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Table of Contents

Articles

Common Sense: the Demand Side, the Supply Side, and the Far Side ..3
Wolfgang Fach and Anne Hodgson

Rescuing the Past 23
David Gross

Karl Popper and the Frankfurt School 33
Robert D'Amico

Adorno's Anti-Avant-Gardism 49
Peter Bürger

Autopoiesis: Critique of a Postmodern Paradigm 61
Danilo Zolo

Notes

The Society of the Spectacle 20 Years Later: A Discussion 81
Russell Berman, David Pan and Paul Piccone

Politics, Intellectuals and the University 103
Frank Adler

Ivory Tower and Red Tape: Reply to Adler 109
David Pan

Artificial Negativity and Affirmative Action in Universities 117
Emery M. Roe

Artificial Negativity as a Bureaucratic Tool? Reply to Roe 127
Paul Piccone

Reinhard Bendix (1916-1991) 141
Guenther Roth

State, Legitimation and "Civil Society" 143
Reinhard Bendix

Hitler's Successor: Saddam Hussein in the Context of German History. 153
Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Reviews

What Theory? Whose Community? 158
Robert D'Amico

The Holocaust, Modernity and Tough Jews 170
Jack Zipes

The Character of our Content 184
Kevin Mattson

The Tribulations of Economic Reforms 186
Andrew Pienkos

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Maud Lavin
The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch
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Chaplin Reception in Weimar Germany
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Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture
Eric Rentschler
Mountains and Modernity: Relocating the *Bergfilm*
Gertrud Koch
Rudolf Arnheim: The Materialist of Aesthetic Illusion

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Shierry Weber Nicholsen
Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*
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Common Sense: the Demand Side, the Supply Side, and the Far Side

Wolfgang Fach and Anne Hodgson

The Loss of Common Sense

When in 1982 Herman Kahn celebrated Reagan's America as the location of the "coming boom" and "super-industrial" growth, he was certain that the move pivoting the country toward this new stage would be the restoration of "good instincts and common sense."[1] Nor had he any doubts about the specific attitudes required (and at that time almost forgotten): "During the early stages of industrialization, when success is still in doubt, hard work and sacrifices are not only acceptable, they are usually made willingly and highly approved by one's peers. But by the time a nation has created an industrial base and established a relatively efficient economy, sacrifices are made more grudgingly . . ."[2] Some two hundred years ago, another prophet of common sense, Benjamin Franklin, recommended to his compatriots what he thought would launch America's first, still pre-industrial "boom." Admonishing Americans that "early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," he drew up the exemplary code of diligent behavior suited to turn rough men into good citizens and a primitive society into a flourishing nation.

Kahn and Franklin deal with opposite ends of the problem: "vitalizing" an over-civilized mood vs. civilizing an uncultivated character. Nevertheless, from their different starting points they approach the

1. Herman Kahn, *The Coming Boom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), p. 182.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

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same "middle ground," i.e., a *sound sense common to all*, at least to all Americans. At the core of this mental "*juste milieu*" of values, whether nearly lost (Kahn's worry) or not yet found (Franklin's problem), is *work*, whether primitive (by hand) or sophisticated (high-tech). In short, the battle for common sense comes down to the reinforcement of the work ethic — and appears to be in full swing today. A special "culture" based on "poverty" is said to have developed, stubbornly evading the work ethic, and society at large does not tolerate this kind of deviant behavior. The *demand* for and *supply* of "normality" are drifting apart — with uncertain but potentially dangerous consequences.

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss political strategies proposed to close the gap, bringing the "uncommon" groups into line with the "common" (the "demand side"). It is a *debate about a debate*, not about actions. For, put bluntly, during the past few decades, the war on deviance has lost its substance and has turned into a war of words. In setting think-tanks against each other, the battles pretend to initiate public policies that make sense. But, as it turns out, the controversy ends up on a merry-go-round of conflicting positions, none of which is left undamaged enough to open up a promising perspective. Then, changing the point of entry, the paper considers the "lower" part of the problem, i.e., those people whose behavior is considered deviant (the "supply side"). Following common practice, two groups are singled out, namely teenage mothers and the homeless. Bypassing the real-life situation of these men and women, the discussed strategic positions do not even touch upon the problems they promise to solve. As this striking failure does nothing to correct the situation, the paper suggests that there is a hidden sense, a "far side" to the debate. Accordingly, the latent function of the welfare debate is to reinforce the common sense among the "haves" by making them constantly aware of the misery of the "have-nots" — which, for that reason, must not disappear.

Common Sense: The Demand Side

The now traditional, liberal answer to the demise of industry and normality was, first, to blame the objective conditions — poverty, unemployment, homelessness, lack of education, and, not to forget, racial discrimination — for producing "victims." Hence, second, it was up to society to improve the situation of these oppressed people, most of them black, until they enjoyed equal opportunity and, therefore, lived up to "normal" standards. This is the logic of "welfarism."

Of course, times have changed. The welfare state has come under severe attack, and the welfare philosophy is definitely out.This is not to

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say that there is a better alternative other than welfare rid of some flaws characteristic of its past. To be sure, "neo-liberal" doubts prevail nowadays, and many critics flatly deny that any kind of improvement is even conceivable (most prominently Charles Murray[3]). But, tellingly enough, a group of high-ranking experts advising the White House has come up with the proposal to expand significantly the system of public welfare. They consider this alternative to be the one and only way of winning the war on poverty in the long run — only to hear from the government that "new programs for the poor are too expensive or too political";[4] *nota bene*, too costly and too political, i.e., unfeasible, not ineffective. At the same time, the demand for conformity with the established work ethic has not decreased, which has called for alternative strategies of enticement. During the past decade, such strategies have, in fact, been proposed. They share a reliance on *organizations* (rather than on men or money) for generating discipline; and they differ according to which institution they consider most suitable for that purpose. The variants are: *community*, *ghetto*, *market*, and *state*. This set seems to be exhaustive and cyclical, its elements alternating in a definite sequence with no other outside elements available.

In Praise of Community

The farewell to the welfare state was a complex event, combining efforts on several levels, from politics to philosophy. While a new conservativism (and liberalism) was attacking "welfarism" at the level of politics, a new "communitarianism" took the offensive on the academic battlefield against the liberal "socialism" of the Rawls type.[5] Born of the same *Zeitgeist*, they advocated the same institutional turn: from state support to *community* control as panacea for reconstituting an ailing work ethic.

The fluid, if mostly latent transition from political conservatism to philosophical communitarianism is particularly evident regarding the question of merit. The popular distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor, i.e., between those willing to work and those considered idle, surfaces in Alasdair MacIntyres discussion of "desert."[6] Taking a stand against competing ("socialist") positions which assess the value of a society by the benefits for (rational) individuals, he turns the

3. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
4. *New York Times* (July 6, 1990).
5. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) and Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
6. MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, pp. 245ff.

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argument around: "Their views exclude any account of human community in which the notion of desert in relation to contributions to the common tasks of that community in pursuing shared goods could provide the basis for judgments about virtue and unjustice."[7] That is, not social justice but social duty provides the standard for what help people may expect in case of need. Only if they have proven virtuous are they entitled to compassion, and virtue is essentially displayed by decent working habits, involving "standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods."[8]

The parallel reaches still further. The "community" idea covers a broad range of organizations — households, neighborhoods, cities; even nation states are not excluded in principle. One is not mistaken in assuming that the question of who deserves what will be answered differently according to which institution provides the "goods." Following the modern trend and an old tradition (Tocqueville), MacIntyre does not hold much store by the modern state; for its rise has made national politics into a "civil war carried on by other means"[9] and fought in the name of competing welfare claims. He backs the alternative of the *local* community: "What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us."[10] As for the social control of deviant behavior and undeserving people, local "brightness" has a fairly definite meaning: there "health clinics, emergency relief agencies, employment services, legal services (. . .) depend for support on local taxes or local philanthropy, and the local taxpayers and philanthropists tend to scrutinize them rather closely."[11]

Communitarians hope that the social network of mutual service and control will succeed in relieving the pressures of a materialistic society and restore virtuous life "*à la puritaine*." Or, as the most popular among modern communitarians has turned the political calculation into a nostalgical reminiscence, "My grandparents were ignorant people by our standards, and my grandfather held only low jobs. But their home was spiritually rich because all things done in it, not only what was specifically ritual, found their origin the the Bible's commandments . . ."[12]

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
11. Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 229ff.
12. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 60.

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The Ghetto Solution

Neither today's communitarians nor their Puritan ancestors have been ready to equate localism with *pluralism*. On the contrary, they both "reject the idea of difference" and defend a "democracy based on sameness" — which is why, the MacIntyres notwithstanding, theirs is not "a democratic theory for our time."[13] There is therefore no reason why this new monism should have any more prospect of succeeding than the liberal one, which in this century has tried to assimilate minority cultures by means of public welfare programs.

In view of this communitarian dilemma, some common sense philosophers have come to discard the original idea of a homogeneous society composed of identical communities: "After two centuries of massive immigration and urbanization, we cannot share Jefferson's bucolic vision of rural and small-town America . . ."[14] In their view, the community's effort "to empower people" calls for pluralistic social structures. For "empowerment through pluralism" to work, it is necessary to accept the patchwork of widely varying lifestyles as given, each variant having its intrinsic value and right to exist: "The tribal patterns evident at an Upper West Side cocktail party are no less tribal than those evident at a Polish dance in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. That the former is produced by the interaction of people trying to transcend many particularisms simply results in a new, and not necessarily more interesting, particularism. From which follows: "*Liberation is not escape from particularity but discovery of the particularity that fits.*"[15]

What does "empowerment" mean? According to Berger and Neuhaus, what is at stake is equal opportunity: The ghetto paradigm "aims at empowering poor people to do the things that the more affluent can already do." For "the black and the poor (. . .) see their interests attached to a system of rewards roughly associated with 'free enterprise' "[16] — they want to live a "normal" life and be tough and successful. Thus the particular milieu does not erode common sense; better still, the *ghetto* culture actually strengthens the *work* ethic. In this special sense "anything goes," even if the American ideal as a whole is not realized. Or not yet, for one may reckon with a civilizing pull, due to the fact that quite often

13. Thomas Bender, "New York as the Center of 'Difference'," in *Dissent* (Fall 1987), pp. 431ff.

14. Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1977), p. 15.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 13.

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"middle-class and wealthy blacks *choose* to live in Harlem, creating 'good neighborhoods' within an area often dismissed as hopeless."[17]

The idea of the "instrumental" ghetto places the hope in communitarian self-help, organized by an ethnic, mostly black elite. One of the opinion leaders, Glen C. Loury, himself a member of this elite, sees a significant change of public opinion taking place; it turns out "that some black elected officials and leaders of major civil-rights organizations have 'discovered' self-help as a legitimate tool for advancing the condition of the black poor . . ."[18] Self-help has become a popular medicine, one basically not at the state's disposal. The "engagement of better-off blacks in the lives of the poor (. . .) affords an entirely distinct kind of assistance — that is focused on transforming the behavior of dependent persons through social, not financial incentives," i.e., "the powerful forces of internal moral suasion" are mobilized.[19] "Champions" of common sense are supposed "to carry on the war of ideas," and these ideas are, not surprisingly, "hard work, self-application, and native ability."[20]

Imposing the Market

Though perhaps more realistic than its original, from a "truly" realistic viewpoint revised communitarianism ghetto-style, is intriguingly flawed. For it relies on *morality* — that of those who ought to lead and those who are supposed to learn. "Delusive" goodwill-approaches of this kind have always been bound to meet with deep skepticism such as that of Herbert Spencer, who proclaimed the iron law that there is "no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts."[21]

In view of this uncertainty, "realists" have recommended stressing a different leverage: Leaving "the working-aged person with no recourse whatsoever except the job market, family members, friends, and public or private locally funded services. It is the Alexandrian solution: cut the knot, for there is no way to untie it."[22] The uncommon sense of idleness is to be exposed to the raw wind of the *market*, so that it can essentially count on nothing but self-reform, making purification of the self a dictate of survival and not simply a matter of conviction.

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17. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
18. Glen Loury, "Who Speaks for American Blacks?" in *Commentary* (January 1987), p. 34.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
20. Glen Loury, "Beyond Civil Rights," in *The New Republic* (October 7, 1985), p. 25.
21. Herbert Spencer, *Man vs. the State* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), p. 69.
22. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

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Murray managed (for a time, at least) to make this position the center of public debate. In his opinion, the market "razor" could not fail to create the desired effect: "Adolescents who were not job-ready find that they are job-ready after all. It turns out that they can work for low wages and accept the discipline of the workplace if the alternative is grim enough. After a few years, many — not all, but many — find that they have acquired salable skills, or that they are at the right place at the right time, or otherwise find that the original entry-level job has gradually transformed into a secure job paying a decent wage. A few — not a lot, but a few — find that the process leads to affluence."[23] This sounds exactly like the story ghetto moralists would tell, but, due to the (supposedly) irrefutable logic of the market, this time it is considered realistic. Because it "is now intellectually respectable, as until recently it was not, to argue that welfare children should be indoctrinated with middle-class values."[24] It must also be respectable to refrain from any humane action threatening to take the edge off the market's "razor."

Corresponding to the relentless upward logic of austerity, the equally relentless downward logic of altruism, as embodied in welfare programs, makes itself felt: "In each case, the program, however intentionally, *must* be constructed in such a way that it increases the net value of being in the condition that it seeks to change — either by increasing the rewards or by reducing the penalties."[25] Moreover, as an additional unintended consequence, helping some needy people has the effect of making others who are trying hard to make it by their own efforts look rather stupid. From their vantage point, the return of *laisser-faire* is only fair: "For these millions of people, the instantaneous result is that no one makes fun of them any longer. The longer-term result will be that they regain the status that is properly theirs."[26]

"Bringing the State Back In"

Others have doubts. According to them, "only work works."[27] People acquire working habits by working and not by suffering alone. Small wonder, then, that the market strategy, hardly launched, has run into severe criticism, especially among those previously sympathetic to its goal: "Conservatives often suppose," comments one of these critics,

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23. *Ibid.*, pp. 228f.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
27. Mickey Kaus, "The Work Ethic State," in *The New Republic* (July 7, 1986), p. 33.

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"that welfare demoralizes the lower class, while to abolish welfare would automatically produce the kind of self-reliant behavior typical of the rest of the population. Actually, there is no reason to suppose that a more small-government, market-oriented society would achieve any particular level of social functioning."[28]

Some people, so-called outcasts, just will not work. To them, even the prospect of death is no deterrent. This brings us back to the moral issue. But this time, virtue is not merely recommended by communitarian pressure, but rigorously enforced by public power. If only work works, it is up to the government to provide *and* to enforce work. "Bringing the state back in"[29] means that "Government plays a role in producing such virtue by supporting civic behavior when it does *not* serve self-interest. The role of public authority is precisely to make *obligatory* the norms that people commonly affirm but do not reliably obey, a gap that is especially wide for the underclass. For the unskilled and unmotivated to work regularly requires *more* government in this sense rather than less."[30] For imposing "work eventually means providing government jobs. Requiring work of welfare mothers means a large day care program. The work ethic culture we want to establish is a national culture, and it requires a national program, not a federalist cacophony."[31]

The "work ethic state"[32] is on the rise, at least if its champions would have their way. Its most striking characteristic is the essential congruence of private and public, of bourgeois and *citoyen* — a good citizen is he who is a good worker: "If society seriously wants more of the disadvantaged to work regularly, to achieve goals like integration, then it must require them to. Merely to offer the jobless freedom and the opportunity to work will not suffice, at least under current conditions. Work must be treated as a public obligation . . ." Accordingly, nonwork is considered a "rebellious action."[33]

As far as it goes, the "workfare" strategy seems perfect in principle. It not only takes into account the flaws of pro-welfare "doves" and pro-market "falcons," but also seems to overcome the communitarian fallacy of relying on a kind of community which "has indeed dissolved in the low-wage labor market."[34] Yet a significant ambiguity remains that

28. Lawrence Mead, *Beyond Entitlement* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 86.
29. Peter Evans et al., eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, MA: 1985).
30. Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
31. Kaus, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Mead, *op. cit.*, pp. 82, 85.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

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cannot but eclipse the surplus power of workfare. Nonwork, to be sure, is not punished in a strict sense, like "rebellious actions" would be; it entails only the withdrawal of a privilege, namely getting "the states's money," a punishment which, as we know, is not always an especially serious threat.

Family — The Fetish of Late

Small wonder, then, that workfare is no longer "the hottest thing in the hot field of welfare reform."[35] It has been outlived by its essential insight — the "rediscovery of character,"[36] the most promising target for a policy of common sense. The very reason, recent critics maintain, that values and not funds or jobs are at the bottom of today's poverty, has led to recommendations distinctive "for recognizing that the political adjustments to be made by governments (federal and local) can supply only a small fraction of the necessary remedies." Lately, "sending the right signal" means emphasizing the *family*.[37] In other words, we are closing the circle, coming back to communitarianism of a kind.

What public welfare policies, including those aimed at character, lack, is "thick prescription" (to paraphrase Clifford Geertz). As for reaching the population concerned, policies neither reach out far enough (lack of extensity) nor do they get close enough (lack of intensity) to channel floating loads of energy into fixed strands of normality. A "new consensus"[38] has therefore emerged, recognizing "that even if workfare programs were instantly geared up experimentally in every state and in every locality, tailored to local circumstances, even the best programs would reach only a fraction of the population for which they are intended. Even then, such programs might be expected successfully to move mothers (i.e., female AFDC-recipients, the most troubling group of culprits) from dependency only in some percentage of cases."[39]

In the recent past, therefore, "both Democrats and Republicans, the White House and the Congress, and students of poverty from all points of the political spectrum" have begun "re-examining the bases

35. Kaus, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

36. James Q. Wilson, "The Rediscovery of Character. Private Virtue and Public Policy," in *The Public Interest* No. 81 (Fall 1985), pp. 3-15.

37. Michael Novak, "Sending the Right Signal," in *The Public Interest* No. 89 (Fall 1987), p. 26.

38. AEI (American Enterprise Institute), *The New Concensus on Family and Welfare* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1987); cf. also *The Public Interest* No. 89 (Fall 1987).

39. Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

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of American family life." They all share the hope of finally having come across the ideal way of bringing "the habits of the heart" in line with the ethic of work: "Helping the family is the most sweeping, practical, and profound way of diminishing poverty. Nearly two-thirds of all Americans below the government's poverty line live in families with children under eighteen. Nearly 80 percent live in families. No other institution is so universal and so basic to society. The family is nature's original department of health, education, and human services." In short, the family is the medium for instilling the work ethic as a therapy against poverty and "dependency,"[40] which is of mounting importance since "the issue for the 1990s is no longer 'poverty', but rather 'dependency'."[41]

To be sure, this emphasis on a well-ordered family life does not imply that other forms of community or even the state no longer matter. The point is to have them reinforce, rather than obstruct, family cohesion. For example, parental "responsibility for the support of children" should be reinforced. Although the nation pays considerable homage to the notion that parents are responsible for the support and upbringing of their children, our practice in recent decades," laments the AEI working group, "has fallen increasingly short of that ideal. Public policies have failed to support the exercise of this responsibility." Or unless "there is a finding that their safety requires, welfare benefits should not be paid to recipients under the age of eighteen living in independent households. Rather, recipients should be aided either in the homes of their own parents or in supervised congregate homes, such as those now being run by voluntary civil, religious, or other social service groups."[42] And so on.

In sum, judging "from the recent outpouring of interest in welfare policy, the United States stand poised on the brink of a new era of social inventiveness, a challenging period in which to imagine new ways to do things."[43] Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the *strategic circle* — from community to community — has begun its next turn. For no sooner has the new approach seen the light of day than even its former supporters have begun to doubt its chances for success.[44]

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40. AEI, *op. cit.*, pp. XIII, 16.
41. Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
42. AEI, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
44. Cf. Mary Jo Bane and Paul A. Jargowsky, "The Links Between Government Policy and Family Structure: What Matters and What Doesn't," in *The Changing American Family and Public Policy*, ed. by Andrew J. Cherlin (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1988), pp. 219-261.

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"Discipline and Punish"

The "circling" of strategies for producing common sense does not imply that they are perpetuated in an unchanging cycle. Specific improvements of strategic finesse, planned or not, cannot be neglected. The second "communitarian" turn targeting the family, for example, does not just repeat the previous one drawing upon the neighborhood. The "new consensus on family and welfare" is in fact superior to the earlier one in that it avoids a decisive error; for while local communities may "ghettoize,"[45] i.e., develop vital cultures skipping or perverting the work ethic, this is not true for families — who must cling to the work ethic if (and only if, of course) they want to secure their own survival.[46]

Nevertheless, compared with the political task ahead, the analytical progress made appears minute: eventually, all "the insitutions of American society will need to become engaged in supporting the struggle of the poor for self-reliance and participation in the common life."[47] The more thoroughly reformers search, the more comprehensive reform plans turn out. Far from continuing to believe in simple ("Alexandrian") solutions to complex problems, they now seem to have turned the situation on its head, searching for a complex solution to a simple problem: "No one forces citizens to injure themselves with drugs or alcohol, but significant numbers do. Citizens are not commanded to have children out of wedlock (. . .) and yet alarmingly high percentages of them do."[48] Just say no — to whatever injures common sense. Enticing this plain decision from the individual character calls for a nation-wide effort to "discipline and punish." In view of this imbalance, a consideration of the supply side of common sense recommends itself.

Common Sense: The Supply Side

Today's common sense has certainly been ready to compromise with its deviants. It has paid a respectable amount of money to get them back on the path of virtue; and, still more generously, it has proved ready to tolerate "strange" forms of (ghetto-based) private lifestyles and (state-centered) public policy styles as long as they promised to support the "normalization" of outcasts.

So far there have been definite limits to flexibility. Above all, today's common sense is not ready to conceive of its opposite independently

45. Berger and Neuhaus, *op. cit.*.
46. Cf. Gilder, *op. cit.*.
47. AEI, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
48. Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

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from what it does, defining it as a "culture of poverty." Implied in this definition are two essential assumptions: First, that the deviants have managed to set up their own *culture*; and, second, that this culture is essentially deficient, for *poverty* is nothing but the lack of wealth. This image appears both necessary and self-defeating. The "culture" label suggests a concerted effort on the part of the underclass to live according to its own patterns, making individual victimization into a myth. The "poverty" label reconfirms the superiority of that sense which would lead the underclass out of its misery. While the image is plausible enough, it does not fit when applied to the provocations which have come to the center of public attention, namely the shocking behavior of *teenage mothers on welfare*, and the appalling appearance of *homeless people* in the streets. The behavior of "typical" — not all — members of these groups seems — and in fact is — beyond this special form of common sense, for they resist re-integration, although for different reasons. Welfare mothers may be members of a specific culture marked by poverty, but it has properties beyond "flat" deprivation. They have established a "deep" structure of "ghetto sense" strong enough to put up a fight against common sense, pitting sense against sense. The homeless are unmistakably poor, but deprivation in itself does not allow them to automatically generate a culture of their own. Instead, their lives follow a pattern of anomic "nonsense," completely isolated from their social environment and therefore not open to measures of reeducation.

Ghetto Sense

As Lee Rainwater has shown in his classic study of the black ghetto family, what may be called "ghetto sense" is part of a victimization process. Experiencing little that "sustains a belief in a rewarding world," the ghetto poor develop "strategies for survival" rather than living according to the codes of "a good, family-based life or of a career."[49] While *creatively* adapting to the no-win situation "in ways that keep them alive and extract what gratification they can find," they "inflict a great deal of suffering on those with whom they make their lives, and on themselves."[50] Since this structure of self-suppression works, they are left alone by whites, which gives the ghetto a large degree of autonomy: "In a curious way, Negroes have had considerable freedom to fashion

49. Lee Rainwater, "Crucible of Identity. The Negro Lower-Class Family," in *Daedalus* Vol. 95, No. 1 (Winter 1966), p. 206.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

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their own adaptations within their separate world. The larger society provides them with few resources but also with minimal interference in the Negro community (. . .) It is in this sense that we may speak of a Negro subculture, a distinctive *patterning* of existential perspectives, techniques for coping with the problems of social life, views about what is desirable and undesirable in a particular situation."[51]

Available resources are spread around through internal networks and institutions which help "to structure the tasks of living a victimized life and to minimize the pain it inevitably produces. In the slum ghetto these institutions include prominently those of the social network — the extended kinship system and the "street system" of buddies and broads which tie (although tenuously and unpredictably) the "members" to each other — and the institutions of entertainment (music, dance, folk tales) by which they instruct, explain, and accept themselves."[52]

Where work is a rare or intermittent commodity and the pay is poor, patterns of making a living differ substantially from the work and family ethic norms. Work is not a *conditio sine qua non*, a welfare or disability check being a well-recognized source of income: "The man's status in the home depends not so much on whether he is working as on whether he brings money into the home."[53] Since women are pessimistic about the likelihood that men will, in fact, be stable providers, they often earn a seperate income distinguished from his as a part of "the high degree of conjugal role segregation." Even a child can have an income from its father or the government considered "separate;" "the baby has a check of her own."[54] Due to both economically and culturally motivated "negative views on marriage," the "easy attitude toward premarital pregnancy," and the feeling shared by many women that "they owe the husband nothing once he fails to perform his provider role," a "pattern" develops "of women living in families and men living by themselves in rooming houses, odd rooms, here and there."[55] What income there is, is redistributed through the kin network, including cousins and older children and such informal family members as boyfriends or unmarried fathers.[56] A father's support of or care for his child will therefore typically take the informal kinship route rather than occurring in wedlock.

"The most desperate people thus feed on one another. In these

51. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 187ff.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 198; cf. also Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

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circumstances, babies and sex are used by some for income; women receive money from welfare for having babies, and men sometimes act as prostitutes to pry the money from the women. The community seems to feed on itself."[57] Even if this kind of family life may not constitute a separate set of internalized ghetto values and may hide a deeper stratum of "bourgeois" desires and ideals,[58] it reinforces itself continuously by working effectively under the given circumstances and, at the same time, by alienating its participants from other ways of living.[59] Family life ghetto style "prepares and toughens its members to function in the ghetto world, at the same time that it seriously interferes with their ability to operate in any other world."[60] In this sense, it makes sense.

Hence, the long-term "dependence" of single black mothers and their children on welfare is one form of creative adjustment to the exigencies of ghetto life. They use the resource of AFDC very differently than do their white counterparts: "In sum, white women tend more often to use welfare for shorter periods of time, even though welfare accounts for most (if not all) of their income while they are on welfare. Black women who head households, in contrast, are more likely to use welfare for longer periods of time, but in conjunction with earnings and other sources of income (e.g., child support), and are less likely to be totally dependent upon welfare, particularly over a period of years."[61] In the world of "ghetto sense," AFDC is incorporated into fluid forms of nurturing not exclusively based on families. Even black fathers perceived as "absent" may be maintaining relations to their out of wedlock children more frequently than are their white or Hispanic counterparts.[62]

It seems more than doubtful whether reducing payments or capacities for adjustment, much less enforcing a "world-of-make-believe" moral consensus by "discouraging early sexual activity,"[63] will integrate the

57. Elijah Anderson, "Sex Codes and Family Life Among Poor Inner-City Youths," in *Annals, AAPSS*, No. 501 (Newbury Park: Sage Publ., January 1989), p. 77.

58. On the idea of a "value stretch," cf. Hyman Rodman, *Lower-Class Families* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

59. Herbert J. Gans, "The Negro Family: Reflections on the Moynihan Report," in *The Moynihan Report and The Politics of Controversy*, ed. by Lee Rainwater and Burt Yancey (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), pp. 445-457.

60. Rainwater, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

61. Diana M. Pearce, "The Feminization of Ghetto Poverty," in *Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1983), pp. 73f.

62. Mercer L. Sullivan, "Absent Fathers in the Inner City," in *Annals, AAPSS*, No. 501, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

63. Maris A. Vinovskis, "Teenage Pregnancy and the Underclass," in *The Public Interest* No. 93 (Fall 1988), pp. 87-96.

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subculture into the dominant culture. Such influence will force the ghetto to develop new methods of "feeding on itself," leading either to new variations of "ghetto sense" — such as increasingly lowering the age of children excluded from the kin network, which feeds the expanding drug culture and destroys what is left of parental authority: "Many teenagers sell crack to adults, sometimes to their own parents, (. . .) giving them new and enormous power over the older generation. Some even give their parents profits from drug sales to help support the family."[64] Or, if the interference destroys intermediate structures — such as the family — *ersatz* gangs not yet connected to organized crime[65] — it can lead to anomic, no-win "nonsense."

Such a development has been taking place in the inner city as a whole, as the resources and their redistributive channels have waned with the exodus of the black middle class and the networks and services their presence provided. "If the 'organized,' or institutional, ghetto of forty years ago (. . .) imposed an enormous cost on blacks collectively, the 'disorganized' ghetto, or hyperghetto, of today carries an even larger price. For, now, not only are ghetto residents, as before, dependent on the will and decision of outside forces that rule the field of power — the mostly white dominant class, politicians, and welfare agencies — they have no control over and are forced to rely on services that are massively inferior to those of the wider society."[66] In other words, welfare and income, without obligations concerning behavior attached, provide values to be circulated. But as these values become increasingly determined by and dependent on outside, "common sense" rules, which both limit the values and the flexibilty of networks redistributing them, sharing in them no longer provides that small sphere of freedom created by the relative autonomy of the ghetto. The destruction of personality and human potential then take on new proportions beyond even "ghetto sense."

Nonsense

Joining the ranks of the homeless may happen as the result of a wide variety of personal careers. These people belong to strongly divergent categories — male and female, old and young, black and white, healthy and ill, many victims and a few heroes "who have taken to the road or the streets for a variety of reasons and who prefer to be

64. *New York Times* (May 2, 1989), p. C1/13.
65. John M. Hagedorn, *People and Folks* (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1988).
66. Loic J. D. Wacquant and William J. Wilson, "The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City," in *Annals, AAPSS* No. 501, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

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there."[67] Nevertheless, in one respect most of them share the common fate of social *isolation*. In Marin's words: "This is, in essence, the same story one hears over and over again on the street. You begin with an ordinary life; then an event occurs — traumatic, catastrophic; smaller events follow, each one deepening the original wound; finally, homelessness becomes inevitable, or begins to *seem* inevitable to the person involved — the only way out of an intolerable situation. You are struck continually, hearing these stories, by something seemingly unique in American life, the absolute isolation involved."[68]

"Extreme poverty" is at the base of their social isolation — such being the story told in a recent Chicago study showing that, on the average, "the literally homeless survive on substantially less than half the poverty-level income"[69] — lending credence to the "culture of poverty" image. But again, even extreme poverty does not create its own value system; after all, most of the poor are neither homeless nor isolated. Those who take the step down from "normal" misery to the cruelty of street life are afflicted with additional handicaps, "disabilities" of all kinds, which are bound to turn a difficult situation into a hopeless condition. "Many disabling conditions plague the homeless, ones that would ordinarily make it difficult or impossible for a person to lead a full life — to obtain employment, participate in social life, or maintain relationships with others."[70]

Prominent among these deficiencies are severe health problems, alcoholism, drug abuse, mental disease, or a criminal past. It is primarily due to them that people are separated from their respectable neighbours, leading to an extreme degree of isolation, as shown by the Chicago study. "The literally homeless are relatively isolated from extended family and from friends. Nearly nine in ten — 88 percent — have surviving relatives and family members, but only three of five — 60 percent — maintain even minimal contact with them — visiting, writing, talking with, or telephoning them at least once every two or three months. Similar low levels of contact with families of procreation — spouses, ex-spouses, or children — were also reported; 55 percent had such persons, but only one in three maintained contact with them. Overall, one in three reported no contact with any relatives and almost

67. Peter Marin, "Helping and Hating the Homeless. The Struggle at the Margins of America," in *Harper's Magazine* (January 1987), pp. 40f.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
69. Peter H. Rossi and James D. Wright, "The Urban Homeless: A Portrait of Urban Dislocation," in *Annals, AAPSS*, No. 501, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

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one in four reported no contacts with either relatives or friends."[71]

Note that the "contacts" mentioned here are not only rare but are also far below that threshold above which something like social life really begins. Moreover, there are many cases in which isolation follows *and* precedes homelessness, a relation of mutual reinforcement which almost automatically makes every effort at correction an error of judgment. "The old tramp," a sensitive bishop pointed out as early as the 1930s, "had, as a usual thing, the sort of memories which, when awakened, often brought him to his senses. Today many unfortunates can look back only to the same sort of life they are living now."[72]

Chronic lack of contact makes people into "misfits." As Theodor Caplow said of New York's famous Bowery, "For the price of a subway ride, (one) can enter a country where the principles of social interaction do not apply."[73] It is a country pervaded by *anomie*, with "antisocial behavior patterns" dominating everyday life. From the viewpoint of well-ordered society, what happens in the world of homelessness is simple *nonsense*, an occasion for sightseeing tours, at best.[74] But for those who cannot put a bus window between themselves and these people, it turns into a scary, disgusting "underworld." The homeless, as Roger Starr has summed up a common mood, "are no longer out of sight, and their numbers are now unprecedented. Their aggressive behavior and bizarre appearance — often compounded by mental instability and chemical addictions — frighten and discomfit urban residents, who react by proclaiming their hometowns Calcuttas."[75]

To be sure, it is only from the "established" viewpoint that this bizarreness comes down to nothing but nonsense. For the homeless, living in the street and behaving like a fool may easily be a rational reaction to the personal mess he or she has gotten into in the past. Take for instance the quite common example of an average veteran. "The price of returning to America was to forget what they had seen or learned in Vietnam, to 'put it behind them.' But some could not do that, and the stress of trying showed up as alcoholism, broken marriages, drug addiction, crime. And it showed up too as life on the street, which was for some vets

71. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

72. Quoted in Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Bowery: From Residential Street to Skid Row," in *On Being Homeless: Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Rick Beard (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1987), p. 76.

73. Quoted in Kim Hopper, "The Public Response to Homelessness in New York City — The Last Hundred Years," in *On Being Homeless*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

75. Roger Starr, "No Calcutta," in *The Public Interest* No. 97 (Fall 1989), p. 112.

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a desperate choice made in the name of life — the best they could manage. It was a way of avoiding what might have occurred had they stayed where they were: suicide, or violence done to others."[76]

According to this interpretation, homelessness results from a "choice" which has (presumably) been made step by step, with a built-in point of no return. Indeed, the only way to get over such traumatic experiences like war or rape may be to lead a life completely outside the "guilty" society, radically cut off from normal respectability and common decency. Whether doomed to homelessness right from birth (as witnessed by the above-mentioned bishop), or struck down by fate in the middle of their lives, homeless people emerge as an essentially untreatable — and for that reason well-defined — group.

"Homelessness is a much smaller problem, in terms of the number of people affected by it, than is commonly thought, but it is also much more intractable than advocates understand."[77] They certainly are no target for reform, and are even less approachable than welfare mothers, who, after all, *need* society, or at least its funds, and perhaps continue to share some of its dreams.

The Far Side of Common Sense

The issue at stake is whether and how public policy can succeed in restoring common sense among those "citizens" who have habitually offended its core value, work. After arousing wide public attention and triggering a whole string of scientific controversies, the question continues to be debated in apparently unchanged terms. It therefore promises to retain a peculiar quality based on three aspects. First, the problem discussed is of minor political importance "objectively" — neither welfare mothers nor homeless people are voters of much account. Second, in spite of their marginal positions, these segments of the population have enjoyed continuous attention. And third, this attention, intense and intelligent as it has been, has failed notoriously to produce the desired effect — having gained, by and large, nary an inch of the "contested terrain." Nevertheless the "discourse" stays alive, and it is as vital as ever.

Perhaps the paradox can be explained by shifting the perspective, taking into account that every "government program, almost every private project, is geared as much to the needs of those giving help" as it is to

76. Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

77. Thomas J. Main, "What We Know About the Homeless," in *Commentary* (May 1988), p. 31.

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the needs of those receiving it.[78] Hence, we must look at the "construction and uses of social problems."[79] Apart from the self-evident "use" of discussing (and fighting) misery in order to free the common sense from its bad conscience, a latent function may be at work. As it happens, a similar paradox has been noted by Michel Foucault in view of the prison system and its unending reform. Word for word, from one century to another, the same fundamental propositions are repeated. They reappear in each new, hard-won, finally accepted formulation of a reform that has hitherto always been lacking. The same sentences or almost the same could have been borrowed from other "fruitful" periods of reform.

To Foucault, this experience has its own peculiar sense. "For the observation that prison fails to eliminate crime, one should perhaps substitute the hypothesis that prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically less dangerous — and, on occasion, usable — form of illegality; in producing delinquents, in an apparently marginal but in fact centrally supervised milieu; in producing the delinquent as a pathologized subject."[80]

What applies to prisoners may also hold true for welfare mothers and the homeless. According to this view, the resilience of their existence and the tirelessness with which it is observed prove useful for the affirmation of common sense: the victims are transformed into habitual offenders, "delinquents," who can be *stigmatized* reliably and who in that way (unwillingly, of course) reconfirm the normality of their benefactors. To be sure, this is not the welfare debate's shrewd purpose, but it may be its hidden effect and unintended consequence — which would, as in the case of Foucault's prison report, explain the strange fact of a *permanently failing reform*. In this sense, the very failure makes a success story: the American way of life is strengthened by its "far side," the lifestyle of those who are "down and out in America."

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78. Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

79. Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

80. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 277.

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Rescuing the Past

David Gross

All the central ideas of Critical Theory were originally formulated between the early 1930s and the mid-1950s. Though it is true that some of the major works of Critical Theory appeared subsequent to the 1950s — for example, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) or Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) — it is also true that these works were essentially elaborations on concepts developed two or three decades earlier. Ironically, it was just at the point when Critical Theory had lost its initial impetus that it was "discovered" by some elements within the New Left in Europe and North America and thereby given a new lease on life, but now, under circumstances very different from those pertaining in the 1930s or 1940s. One of the conditions of Critical Theory's survival, therefore, was that it be at least partially rethought and re-worked. Consequently, a process of reappropriating Critical Theory began to occur in the decades between the 1960s and the 1980s, with the result that there are today two principle strains of Critical Theory, both of which can claim a lineage directly or indirectly traceable to the founding generation.

The first strain is that developed by Habermas and enlarged upon by his colleagues and followers. Springing up initially in the 1960s, this tendency preserved some elements of classical Critical Theory, but it jettisoned much more than it kept, especially after taking a decisive methodological turn towards linguistics and systems theory. The second strain is that often identified with some of the editors of, and writers for, *Telos*. Emerging in the mid-1970s, this neo-Adornian tendency rejected the Habermasian "revisionism" and sought a return to what it

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regarded as the original spirit of the first generation of critical theorists. Hence, instead of being drawn to communication theory, the neo-Adornians moved toward a theory of "artificial negativity" which was seemingly more faithful to the insights of the earlier Frankfurt School. Similarly, instead of taking up and defending practical reason as the Habermasians did, the neo-Adornians remained focused on what they regarded as the destructive and reifying power of instrumental reason. Both these directions within contemporary Critical Theory contain a number of valuable elements, but they also share a common shortcoming, which is the lack of an adequate outlook on the past as such.

The Habermasians, for their part, have shown a striking indifference to the historical past, and especially to that part of it which precedes the era of modernity. Their primary concern has been with the present and the future, or more precisely with how to move from a more or less unsatisfactory present to a better future. With this as a focal point, the methodology they have chosen to work with is that of immanent critique. Their guiding assumption is that present-day society, in the process of establishing itself, has produced tensions and contradictions which, if developed forward, could prepare the way for a more humane and rational polity than the one we have now. Existing reality, it is assumed, contains emancipatory possibilities which lie within modernity, not outside or beyond it. These possibilities need to be drawn out and made manifest, though not, as Marx would have said, by means of revolutionary praxis, but through what Habermas calls "communicative rationality." According to Habermas' analysis, modernity is rife with problems, but none of them are so intractable that they invalidate modernity itself. Rather, Habermas' inclination is to diagnose problems as "social pathologies" and then treat them as remediable in terms of solutions internal to the system itself. Accepting the Hegelian notion that "the hand that inflicts the wound is alone the hand that can heal it," Habermas sees no reason to look for help beyond or prior to what is in order to resolve the aporias of modernity, since in his view modernity itself provides the answers to the dilemmas it creates. If, for example, modernity has brought with it rationality, then no matter how instrumentalized rationality may have become, it must still be considered the way forward provided it is developed correctly (i.e., discursively, in an "ideal speech situation"). Or, if modernity has ushered in and institutionalized new values like formal legality or democratization, then no matter how traduced these may have become in practice, they are said to hold the key to resolving the problems they have helped create.

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In contrast to this, the neo-Adornians, seeing the forces of cooptation at work practically everywhere, are less sanguine about the possibilities of immanent critique. To them, the dialectic appears to be at a virtual standstill, for there seems to be no crisis so great that it cannot be dealt with successfully, usually by being turned to the advantage of the system itself. More to the point: since both the modern state and the capitalist economy appear capable of containing virtually all tendencies that shoot beyond the given, there would seem to be no "better future" that can be arrived at by means an immanent dialectic. Where, for the Habermasians, the focus of analysis is on the play between the present and the future (with the goal of critique being to unfold what is not-yet within what is), the neo-Adornians focus almost entirely on a stalled present (with the task of critique being a thorough and rigorous analysis of what is, since for now any talk about the play between a bad present and a potentially better future seems to be merely academic). Whatever else might be said about the respective insights of these two opposing camps within present-day Critical Theory, both reveal a blind spot that needs to be addressed. That blind spot is the inability to look backward in a satisfactory way, i.e., to reach out to and make use of valuable material from the past.

Here there is perhaps a lesson to be learned from the first generation of critical theorists. In the 1930s, they too faced a social and political reality which was clearly obstructing the happier future that orthodox Marxism had once confidently promised. With Nazism triumphant in Germany, fascism ascendent in Europe, and Stalinism entrenched in the USSR — and with a working class that was apparently no longer revolutionary, and a fledgling culture industry bent on assimilating and defusing all oppositional energies — it appeared that the possibilities of immanent critique had been blunted if not eliminated altogether. In a "totally-administered world," there were no forces able to take advantage of social contradictions in order to advance history dialectically. Since all speculation about a radically new future seemed beside the point, the first-generation critical theorists were thrown back into an uncompromising criticism of the world of immediacy, with little hope that that critique would or could be consequential in the short run. But in being thrown back upon the present they did not consider themselves imprisoned by it. They also felt free to look backward into the past in order to find there what they could not find or draw out of present circumstances. In this respect, two things stood out as especially important: first, uncoopted or unintegrated material from earlier times

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which could be used as leverage against a present that in every respect appeared "untrue;" and second, utopian anticipations of an unalienated future which was not, and for practical reasons *could not be*, struggled for *in practice*, given the conditions that pertained in the West in the 1930s and 1940s.

For perhaps the first time in the history of the Left since the early 19th century, the idea of looking backward, or remembering what had gone before, began to be viewed as an inherently radical rather than a conservative notion.[1] Whereas for orthodox Marxists no less than for the Habermasians the "play" that mattered was between the present and the future, for the original members of the Frankfurt School the play that mattered was on the contrary the one that existed between the present and the past.

What exactly did the early critical theorists see when they looked backwards? What was it in the past that they considered valuable enough to be rescued so that it could be set against a one-dimensional present?

At least a couple of things become immediately obvious. For one, as pointed out particularly by Adorno and Marcuse, the high art of the past was something that needed to be remembered and recovered, since it was said to contain, in a way that the culture of the culture industry did not, utopian dreams and possibilities which are provocative and critical when juxtaposed to the falsity of the present. The assumption was that the great art of earlier ages expressed (albeit only aesthetically) a prefigurement of social harmony, and that this harmony could serve as a critique of reality or a protest against the given in lieu of an active critique by real forces of opposition. Besides the art of the past it was also suggested — especially by Marcuse — that there are also certain points of original unity (between self and other, or self and nature) discoverable in the past which would be worth remembering and recuperating. Sometimes Marcuse locates these alleged points of unity in the primordial past, or in the archaic memories of the species, going back to a time when the pleasure principle ruled (i.e., before the impositon of surplus

1. Built into 19th century Marxism was the "progressive" notion that what mattered most was not so much (in Benjamin's terms) the unredeemed sufferings of ancestors as the yet-to-be-achieved happiness of future generations.

However, if E.P. Thompson and others are correct, some of the earlier 19th century pre-Marxist social movements appear to have drawn their sustenance from remembered "losses" rather than from dreams of a utopian future. See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, Vintage, 1963); and Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

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repression); at other times such moments are said to stem from the earliest months of one's personal life, where there were experiences of wholeness between child and mother, without an artificial split between subject and object.[2] According to Marcuse, recalling such utopian moments of unity and oneness, and preserving them as normative of what existence *should* be like, could provide a method for critically assessing the fragmented and alienated conditions that prevail in modern life.

More interesting than these, however, are two other facets of the past which the early critical theorists looked at when they looked backwards: one was history and the other tradition. I want to suggest that there is something worthwhile in the way the first-generation critical theorists approached both, even though this concern for the past has not been picked up by either the Habermasians or the neo-Adornians. It would be an important undertaking to reevaluate how Critical Theory in the 1930s and 1940s regarded both history and tradition, since one can find in these early formulations some important concepts that ought not to be overlooked.

First of all, history. Though initially all the early critical theorists accepted and worked within a Marxist or neo-Marxist framework, all rejected from the outset the notion that history amounted to a temporal unfolding of reason and freedom, with of course zig-zags or occasional reversals here and there. Not only did Marxism assume a progressive direction to history, but so did Hegelianism, and so, too, did most 18th and 19th-century bourgeois social theorists and historians.

Against this point of view, the critical theorists of the 1930s offered two alternatives. First, they suggested that not only is history not inherently rational and progressive, but it may in fact not even exist as a discernable form or structure. Writing in 1932, for example, Adorno argued that history forms "no structural whole:" there is, he says, no advancing, unfolding reason making reality more rational.[3] In 1930 Horkheimer made a similar point. "History," he wrote, "has no reason. . . . The pantheistic granting of autonomy to history . . . is nothing but dogmatic metaphysics." And later, in an essay dating from 1932, he added: "There exists no essentiality or uniform power which [can] bear the name of 'history'."[4]

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2. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), pp. 18-19, 31, 33, 142, 229-30.

3. See Theodor W. Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984), pp. 111-24.

4. Horkheimer citations from Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), pp. 47, 223.

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Hence, to believe in a teleological process called history is to believe in something mythical or illusory. But in addition to this argument against history, the founders of Critical Theory offered another, namely that even if there were such a thing as history, it would perhaps have to be considered a story not of gradual progress, but of regression. As Adorno expressed it in his often cited words from *Negative Dialectics*, "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb."[5] If this statement is taken seriously, then history — to the extent that it even exists as a framework of explanation — points the way to damnation, not salvation. The only conclusion one can legitimately draw is that history is either false consciousness or an account of advancing horror and terror, and in either case nothing hopeful can come from placing one's faith in it. Thus to identify oneself with what Benjamin (following Marx) called the "locomotive of history" — as the critical theorists believed the German working class and the European communist parties in general had done — would be to identify either with something that did not exist (and hence was going nowhere), or it would be to identify with something that was going rapidly *in the wrong direction*.

With this in mind, the task should be, according to the first-generation critical theorists, to explode the alleged continuum of history, to brush history against its own grain, and to "blast out" from the story of history-as-progress all that is hidden or suppressed.[6] This would mean blasting out everything that is angular, untimely, and unsuccessful, everything that failed to fit into the grand narrative of history, including all that has normally been labelled "unprogressive." Presumably this would include various modes of thought which, by present standards of evaluation, would be termed dysfunctional. It would also include fragments of discarded value systems as well as latencies and tendencies which never had a chance to develop. All of these things are normally hidden from view when history (including Marxist history) is seen as a triumphal procession from the past to the present. Instead of forgetting what history has excluded, the goal should be to recover the detritus of the past by literally re-collecting the non-utilitarian (and

5. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 320.

6. These formulations are from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." They were also embraced by Adorno, Horkheimer, and other critical theorists in exile when they first received and read them in the fall of 1940, not long after Benjamin committed suicide.

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hence potentially disruptive) values, worldviews, sensibilities, and ethical systems left behind as history has moved perhaps too rapidly from what is old and antiquated to what is new and "modern." True, this kind of recuperation necessarily brings forward much from the past that may be worthless and even repugnant. But at the same time it also brings forward much valuable and potentially oppositional material that is not and cannot be generated in the present. For the early critical theorists, the point was to recover, and at the same time rework for contemporary purposes, values, meanings, and perspectives that should not be lost sight of. To forget the past entirely — that is, *not* to remember what has been supplanted in order to make the present what it is — would be to endorse reification. It would be to buttress the very one-dimensionality that the critical theorists opposed and wanted to shatter, while by contrast the power of memory pointed the way to something beyond the frozen and petrified world which they confronted in their own time. In Adorno's apt phrase, "Every reification is a forgetting."[7] Very simply, the critical theorists wanted not to forget.

Besides history, the other thing the founders of Critical Theory took note of when they looked backwards was tradition. On the whole, it must be said that the main figures of the Frankfurt School were not great lovers of tradition as such. In their view, most existing cultural, religious, and social traditions were in an advanced state of decay, and therefore possessed very few qualities that could be called attractive or endearing. The reigning assumption seemed to be (though this was nowhere worked out in detail) that traditions generally go through three stages. The first is the stage of origin whereby a tradition emerges in response to some need, takes hold in a population, and then gathers momentum and influence as it is passed down from one generation to another. The second stage is one in which the tradition reaches its peak of power and expressiveness; often this stage may last for no more than two or three generations, but for this short span of time the tradition becomes especially creative and stimulating as a mode of explaining the world and providing guidelines for human action. The third stage is one in which the tradition, after having exhausted its creative possibilities, falls into a long period of decline. Here it gradually loses touch with its original social or cultural roots, becomes increasingly abstract or routinized, and hence fails to reflect (or help one interpret)

7. Theodor W. Adorno, in a letter to Walter Benjamin of February 29, 1940. See Adorno's *Über Walter Benjamin* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 159.

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reality. Though it may continue on for several generations before expiring, a tradition stripped of its vitality can only become more rigid, reified, and Alexandrian.

According to the critical theorists, by the 20th century most substantive traditions in the West had moved into the last of these three stages, and for this reason were not thought to be worth salvaging *as traditions*. In fact, instead of trying to prop up various extant but exhausted traditions it was implied that the task should be, as Nietzsche had once put it, to push that which was already falling. But what would happen if traditions, even bankrupt ones, were eliminated? Critical Theory's answer was not that something awful would occur (as conservative commentators at the time would have put it) but rather something good, for with the destruction of tradition the *past itself* would for the first time be opened up to view. The past was understood to be something different than tradition, since it was said to contain an enormous reservoir of possibilities far greater and richer than anything the dominant traditions had managed to tap or institutionalize. To be more precise, if dominant traditions were demolished what could be glimpsed anew would be, first of all, a plethora of repressed traditions (i.e., those numerous traditions that were forced underground and out of sight thanks to the triumph of the traditions that became hegemonic). Secondly, one could also see again with new clarity certain "moments" within the dominant traditions, particularly those moments which were later obscured due to the subsequent history of their interpretation. (Undeniably, some of the most powerful and original messages of any tradition tend, over time, to become deformed or watered-down in the process of being made serviceable.) And finally, one could observe something perhaps even more valuable, namely certain moments which were never realized at all and consequently never actually distorted in practice. Left back in the past is a wealth of "implicit futures" that never came to fruition, i.e., possibilities that got expressed as "ideals" but were never embodied in institutions or forms of behavior.[8] If one returned to past moments such as these, there would be a "going back," but it would be a going back not to something that later got disfigured or misinterpreted, but to that which "was never reached in the first place."[9]

8. See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I:3, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 1236ff.; and Peter Szondi, "Hope in the Past: on Walter Benjamin," *Critical Inquiry*, IV, No. 3 (Spring, 1978), pp. 491-506.

9. Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Back to Adorno," *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989), pp. 5.

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The value of recovering the past behind history or tradition is that, in the process of encountering what is non-identical, it could happen that one is jarred into an awakened consciousness not usually attainable through contact with what is immediate and familiar. When one sees the past in new ways free of the filters of tradition, not only are lost meanings from earlier times released and made available, but meanings concealed *in the present* can also be shaken loose as a result of an experience with the disturbing power of non-contemporaneity. In other words, when a "then" is starkly juxtaposed to a "now" (thereby unsettling many of the cliches of the established reality), one might be better able to glimpse, and perhaps even "liberate," some of the hidden possibilities locked within the present. By reappropriating material from the past in this way — material that progressive theories of history have generally regarded as already transcended — the groundwork could even be laid for the development of a critique of modernity from *outside* of modernity.

At the present time, the neo-Adornians seem to show little interest in this possibility, while the Habermasians outrightly reject it as a viable option. For the latter camp the only undertaking worthwile is to stay within and complete the project of modernity. Nothing pre-modern appears worth reconsidering, and no radical post-modernity is imagined. In this respect, realizing the immanent potential of modernity seems to be the whole point of the historical process and in a sense the "end of history" as we know it.

By speaking of a critique of modernity from outside of modernity I am not suggesting that the past can provide an Archimedean point from which to judge the present. Nor am I suggesting that the past somehow stands for what is true, while the present represents only what is false. Rather my contention is that the past, to the extent that it embodies difference, has the capacity to disorient and unsettle those who come into contact with it. It is the past's otherness, not its "truth," that can be profoundly disturbing. If the past is sharply set against the present, one is then forced to recontextualize the present, to see it in light of the past. It may be that the best angle from which to view the present is not that of the future being born, as an immanent critique would have it, but from the perspective of that which has been transcended. Just as in Hegel it is the vanquished slave who provides the key to understanding the victorious master, so too it may be the superceded past which holds the key to understanding the configurations of the present. But in order for the past critically to illuminate the

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present, I think at least four things would have to obtain. First, as already mentioned, the past would have to be juxtaposed to the present rather than assimilated into it on the present's own terms. Second, the past would have to come forward with its own unmediated structures and values intact. Third, the material from the past would have to contain something profoundly different and disturbing in relation to the present. And fourth, the past would have to come into the present free from manipulation by the state or market. If the state or market has a hand in recuperating the past (either for purposes of legitimation or profit), one has to suspect that a form of artificial negativity may somehow be at work behind the scenes. Ideally for the past to be most helpful it would have to come forward on the social level with the same startling force that Freud's "return of the repressed" allegedly does on the individual level. It is worth recalling that for Freud it is not the ego that intentionally conjures up repressed material, but rather the material comes of its own accord and often overwhelms the carefully-constructed defenses the ego has established. The same would be true in the realm of politics or economics. Wherever the state or market seeks to recover the past, one is right to wonder if it is the real past that is being revived, or only an instrumentalized or commodified version of it.

Thus simply recovering the otherness of the past in no way guarantees that it will not be coopted. The danger is always present that what is nonidentical will be assimilated into what Henri Lefebvre called our "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption."[10] But by the same token, one can also never be sure that what is different or non-synchronous will not introduce something unmanageable into the present situation — something that may get out of hand and release unintended critical consequences that disrupt the logic of the given. That such a disruption could occur is at least a possibility. At a time when there is very little else around that has been able successfully to challenge or disturb what is, a radical reappropriation of the past may be a project well worth pursuing.

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10. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. by Sacha Rabinovitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 68ff.

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Karl Popper and the Frankfurt School

Robert D'Amico

The infamous "methodology dispute" in German sociology that occurred primarily between Popper and Adorno, with further details taken care of by such surrogates as Hans Albert and the young Habermas, is best described as a misfire.[1] Popper admitted he did not know the work of the Frankfurt School at the time, and even claims he was unaware they were committed to Hegelian-Marxism until well after the debate or he would simply have repeated the arguments he made years earlier in *The Poverty of Historicism*. Popper considered Adorno a poor philosopher but an interesting cultural critic, and specifically a good music theorist (since that was one of Popper's life-long interests). In Popper's autobiography, *Unended Quest*, he adopts some Adornoesque views about distinctions in modern music, independently, however, of Adorno's writings. He did appreciate Adorno's style, but only to the extent that it reminded him of Karl Krauss.

In Adorno's case, neither in his reply during the debate nor in the later essays, does he show any detailed knowledge of Popper's views on political theory or the philosophy of science. In the actual debate Adorno pointed to a number of areas of agreement between himself and

1. Theodor W. Adorno, et. al. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. by Gyln Adey and David Frisby (New York; Harper Torchbooks, 1976). Ralf Dahrendorf's essay in the collection recounts the disappointment of the organizers about the lack of a debate between Popper and Adorno. Certainly it was in part due to selecting Popper, a life-long critic of positivism, as the supposed proponent of positivism against Adorno. In Popper's essay, which was a series of theses about social science and required knowing his other work to be fully understood, he of course attacked positivism and that is what Adorno focused on as the points of agreement in his reply. Finally, the controversy continued with the editing of the volume, which allowed Adorno to append a very long "Introduction," and essay, "Sociology and Empirical Research" which, in the opinion of the Popperians, misrepresented what occurred in the actual debate.

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Popper, to the apparent shock of the organizers. But even these tend to be superficial. Specifically, Adorno does not confront the most serious Popperian challenges to the foundations of Critical Theory.[2] Since the debate had been organized on the assumption that Popper was a positivist, or at least supported that position, positivism, as usual, ended up as the dead horse, the straw man, the proxy, the whipping boy (take your choice), which received from each participant one more in a series of seemingly endless beatings.

Before turning to the debate with Adorno, it is useful to provide a brief systematic survey of what Popper wrote on political theory, philosophy of the social sciences and philosophy of history. As it turns out, there was a deeper agreement between these thinkers which, however, reveals also a much more fundamental disagreement than comes out, even indirectly, in their debate. Adorno seems to suggest that he could not debate Popper directly because Popper's talk of "problem situations" as the basis for all theoretical inquiry distorts the role of Critical Theory. Adorno replies that social reality cannot be studied systematically. "Society is full of contradictions and yet determinable; rational and irrational in one, a system and yet fragmented; blind nature and yet mediated by consciousness. The sociological mode of procedure must bow to this."[3] This typical Adornoesque stance is, however, not the issue between them. Popper's situational logic does not require the systematic assumptions or separations Adorno sees as indeterminate.

As Popper has written in several articles and his autobiography, he encountered Marxism as a young man in Austria around 1919. For two or three months he called himself a communist, but soon turned against the doctrine after the deaths of pro-communist demonstrators was justified with what Popper considered pseudo-scientific jargon. These events made him a fallibilist acutely aware of the distinction between dogmatic and critical thinking. His encounter with Marxism, Freudian

2. The works of Popper that provide background to the 27 theses on the philosophy of the social sciences that Popper read under the title "Logic of the Social Sciences" includes; *Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1986), *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vols. I and II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), and selected essays in *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1972), *Unended Quest*, revised edition (La Salle: Open Court, 1984) and *Popper: Selections*, ed. by David Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). There is reported to be an unpublished manuscript by Popper with the title, *Myth of the Framework*, which discusses the Frankfurt School at some length. Some of these arguments about the theory of knowledge and the idea of a framework, but without reference to political theory, are raised in Popper's reply to Kuhn called "Normal Science and Its Dangers" in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

3. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

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and Adlerian psychology, in contrast to his study of relativity theory, led him to define what he calls a "demarcation problem," namely the distinction between scientific and pseudo-scientific disciplines.

Popper's systematic writing on these subjects, however, would wait until after his first philosophical text: the long and virtually unnoticed criticism of positivism under the title *Logik der Forschung* (which would not appear in English, as *Logic of Scientific Discovery,* until 1959). Between 1935 and 1938 Popper worked on what he would call his "war effort." These two books, *Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, were written together and provide a systematic argument which links problems of epistemology with social theory. Though both works were to gain Popper, at least initially, much greater notoriety than his writings in the philosophy of science, neither became available until after the war.

Historicism 1 and 2

A great deal of ink has been spilt on Popper's use of the term "historicism" to define his attack on Marx and Marxism. Popper is aware that two different positions fall under this heading and that his use of the term was idiosyncratic. The two positions can be called historicism 1 and historicism 2. Historicism 1 is the position that the social sciences are concerned with historical prediction, as modelled on the natural sciences, and that the existence of historical laws allows social theorists to discern trends, patterns or periods of history. It is historicism 1 that Popper considers "impoverished." Historicism 2 is the doctrine, often opposed to historical laws, that all knowledge is sociologically or historically conditioned and thus limited. All inquiry into history rests on absolute presuppositions or frameworks which are themselves not open to question or investigation. Frameworks change and thus vantage points on human history and society change, but these changes are not ordered toward truth or ruled by some causal, lawful or teleological order. Of course, this is the most relativist form of historicism 2, and there are obviously a variety of versions falling between these extremes.

Popper called the second position "historism" and did not discuss it systematically, though he admitted some influence by Rickert, Windelband, and Weber on his idea of the "situational analysis." Popper's position on social science, his view of general interpretations and the logic of situation, bears some link to aspects of this second view without being entirely identical to it, especially in its fully relativist form. In fact Popper was to return to this point later in his reply to the work of Kuhn. Popper notes that Kuhn's position rests on the idea that all science presupposes frameworks which, though held in common during an historical period, cannot be critically discussed or challenged. Popper replies:

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"I do admit that at any moment we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories: our expectations: our past experiences: our language. But we are prisoners in a Pickwickian sense: if we try, we can break out of our framework at any time. Admittedly, we shall find ourselves again in a framework, but it will be a better and roomier one; and we can at any moment break out of it again."[4] Popper concludes that this "Myth of the Framework" is the bulwark of irrationalism and relativism and that it is the fundamental difference between his view of situational analysis and historicism 2. At any rate, the failure to note this difference between "historicism" and "historism" in Popper has been the bane of Popper's critics. Even Adorno fell into the confusion when he oddly asserts that Popper, unlike himself, views positively the Rickertian distinction between ideographic and nomothetic sciences.

It is a further interesting aspect of this intellectual history that Popper's quite detailed, empathetic, and substantive discussion of Marx in *The Open Society* has been virtually ignored by commentators and critics, while discussion concentrated on his more marginal treatment of Hegel and Plato. This may be due in part to the fact that the "official" reply to Popper was the unbelievably ham-fisted piece of nonsense by Maurice Cornforth called *The Open Philosophy and the Open Society: A Reply to Dr. Karl Popper's Refutations of Marxism*. Whatever was of value in Popper was buried under an avalanche of scholarly defenses of Plato and Hegel through detailed exegesis and the rantings of orthodox Marxists.

The idea behind Popper's criticism of historicism was a link he saw between social philosophy and epistemology. In a fascinating essay called "Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance" Popper discusses the links between "epistemological optimism," which hopes to find truth through sense experience or intuitions in the mind, and political doctrines. He argues "It is a disturbing fact that even an abstract study like pure epistemology is not as pure as one might think . . . but that its ideas may, to a large extent, be motivated and unconsciously inspired by political hopes and by Utopian dreams."[5]

In view of such a possibility, familiar to readers of Critical Theory, Popper does not, however, seek a total social transformation as the solution to epistemological problems. Rather, he calls for an effort to weed out the utopian political elements from the epistemological questions by a systematic criticism of those epistemological assumptions found in liberalism. In the same article Popper concludes: "In examining the optimistic epistemology inherent in certain ideas of liberalism, I found

4. Popper, "Normal Science and Its Dangers," *op. cit.*, p. 56.
5. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

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a cluster of doctrines . . . The most fundamental of them is . . . — the doctrine that truth is manifest."

The most important distinction between Popper and Adorno is not that they do not see social content in epistemology nor that they both link liberalism to a social and intellectual agenda of modernization, but that Popper does not conclude from all this "sociology of knowledge" that there is nothing else for theory to do but await a large scale social transformation. Nor does he conclude from the criticism of truth as "manifest," that means directly present to experience, that there is no distinction between truth and ideology.

First, Popper argues that theory is not so impotent with respect to its fundamental assumptions and, second, large scale social transformation is a cure which is worse than the disease. Theory can help carve out limited areas of social change. But utopian transformations must entail hidden or unintended consequences whose impact cannot be foreseen and thus counteract any good intended by such a project. Popper understands Critical Theory as making possible an unmasking of these hidden agendas. Adorno, on the other hand, sees Critical Theory as constantly at war with instrumentalization. Thus the utopian demand, in Adorno, is treated as emancipatory in relation to the demand for practical problem solving.

Popper had argued against empiricism and rationalism on the basis that both theories attempt to secure a "justification" for knowledge claims in either sensations or mental intuitions. But any form of justificationism conflicted, in Popper's view, with fallibility concerning knowledge claims. The dilemma was resolved by seeing, as Popper argued, that one could live without justification as long as knowledge claims were constantly open to criticism. Popper even considers the parallel claim that such institutionalized criticism requires a specific kind of society: an "open society."

Social theorists are often blinded by the traditional but undefended claim of science to certain and justified knowledge. Further, according to Popper, social theorists mistake scientific laws for empirical discoveries. Instead of seeing a law as a hypothetical conjecture, social theorists hope that laws are like any "matter of fact," i.e., to be found in the world along with lost letters or collections of the pens, tables, and "trees in the quad" so loved by philosophers.

Popper turned to Marx, however, because he thought that Marx's actual effort at social analysis was a good example of what Popper recommends to the social sciences, namely institutional or situational analysis. But in spite of Marx's clever analyses, he remained a thinker caught in the 19th century's idolatry of natural science. Thus Marx thought he

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had discovered certain historical laws, not directly since he was an anti-empiricist, but indirectly by discovering trends or patterns in society, such as the falling rate of profit and the immiseration of the proletariat. Once the idea of historical laws was in place, combined with the doctrine that the laws were fundamentally economic laws, it was one step to Marx's economistic historicism. History had a direction, meaning or logic, embedded in its material structure and forces of production. Such was as natural and inevitable as any material process. It could be altered, of course, but only by knowing and acting in consort with the laws and only in conformity with the stages already predetermined. No society could leap over a stage, but the birth pangs of transition could be lessened. It is this doctrine, under the name of historicism, that Popper tried to refute in any number of ways.

Popper's main arguments reduce to two major points. The idea of an historical law rests on a view that confuses laws (which are hypothetical expressions) with the existence of physical forces in the world. This first confusion has historicists, like Marx, believing that they are making predictions. But a prediction is actually a very artificial and controlled deduction from a theory that may have nothing to do with "everyday" reality. These historicists are actually attempting to be "prophets" of the future; an inherently biased, fallible and self-interested effort.

Second, historicism confuses an account of human action with one of physical movement or behavior. According to this confusion, the "rationality" (or lack of rationality) of human behavior is an empirical problem of laws rather than, as for Popper, simply constitutive of action itself or the problem situation. The result of these two confusions is what Popper called "moral historicism." The future ideal state justifies the sacrifices of the present and thus "history will prove me right." People were swept away by this *belief* in historical destiny — a belief that action can somehow be justified by an inevitable future. All of this was the intellectual source, in Popper's view, of totalitarianism.

Logic of the Situation

In *The Poverty of Historicism*, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* —which was an expansion of the arguments against historicism— and some of the essays in *Conjectures and Refutations* and *Objective Knowledge*, Popper developed a distinctive view about the social sciences. He calls it by various names; situational logic, institutional logic, the function of general interpretation, and, in later writings, "world 3 objectivity." Among the unfashionable positions Popper held in his philosophical career, the most unfashionable was his anti-physicalist and anti-reductionist position on the mind/body problem. His defense of "dualism" is a

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factor in his account of action explanations.

The basic argument in these scattered works is that social theory is not reducible to psychological, physical, or biological sciences. Popper supports the "autonomy of sociology" from psychologism. The profound difference with psychologism is that social science works with typical situations which presuppose that agents act adequately or appropriately given that situation. Such appropriate action is defined by a "rationality principle" which, far from being a law or the foundation for a law, is both empty and clearly false. The rationality principle is not a predictive device but a constitutive principle. All explanation in social sciences is explanation by reasons, not by causes. It presupposes agency. If an explanation fails, the fault lies not in the principle but in the details of the situational analysis.

Popper's most famous position in social philosophy is his opposition to what he calls "methodological holism." What he had in mind was the opposite error from the above reduction to psychologism. Instead of a reductionist strategy, holism circumvents explanations by reasons through functional accounts of whole social practices or institutions. The point is that the institution or practice exists independently of the agent's reasons or intentions. Durkheim's accounts of marriage, kinship, or suicide are cases of both holism and functionalism. But the motivation for this strategy was Durkheim's unwarranted assumption that any account of intentions or purposes reduces sociology to psychology.

Thus, to summarize Popper's position, social theory constructs explanations which maintain agency against physiological, biological, or behaviorist reduction (though any human action can be redescribed as a behavior). Agency is studied by a situational logic or institutional analysis which presupposes rationality. For Popper, practical reason can be objective but not physicalist, scientific but not empiricist, predictive but not prophetic. Though knowledge is marked by social agendas and even unconscious political programs, these uncritical, embedded moments can be dislodged by critical thinking. All utopian solutions, on the other hand, are rejected as holistic and incompatible with the fact of human agency.

Critical Theory

Before turning to Adorno, it may be helpful to briefly review Critical Theory's original position as a form of Lukácsian Marxism (meaning the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*). In other words, Critical Theory cared little for historical laws, the labor theory of value, or economic analyses, but emphasized a sociological account of theoretical and philosophical *concepts*. Ideas and intellectual traditions were analyzed

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functionally as "bourgeois" or "ideological," by arguing that they justified or presupposed such structures as the division of labor, the commodity form, the separation of mental and physical labor, or class differences. Thus, in his famous "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer tries to provide a sociological account of positivism. "The whole perceptible world as present to a member of bourgeois society and as interpreted within a traditional world-view which is in continuous interaction with that given world, is seen by the perceiver as a sum-total of facts, it is there and must be accepted. . . . The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways; through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ."[6] This position is historicism 2.

Such views had been floating throughout German sociology for some time. What Horkheimer added was the distinction between traditional and Critical Theory (again, sounding similar to Popper's distinction between dogmatic and critical thinking). Critical Theory, for Horkheimer, was *not* functional, ideological or non-reflective of embedded social bias. The problem was that, beyond merely asserting this, Horkheimer was caught in a dilemma. His Marxism required that such theory was only possible once the social conditions were transformed, and his "idealism" required that for society to be transformed, other than by mechanical or instrumental means, there must already be a theoretical self-conscious expression.

The dilemma was similar to the *cul de sac* found in traditional sociology of knowledge. The most famous attempt at a foundation for sociology of knowledge was Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, which tried to compromise, with the free-floating intellectual class, between a purely intellectual and purely sociological account of knowledge. But Critical Theory had arisen as much in opposition to such sociology of knowledge as in opposition to positivism, as Adorno repeatedly stressed in his debate with Popper. Thus Horkheimer's solution was ultimately unacceptable.

How was it possible, the question might be reformulated, for Horkheimer to criticize traditional theory if Critical Theory is itself historicist? It was clear what, according to Horkheimer, the critical theorist should do — "he exercises an aggressive critique not only against the conscious defenders of the status quo but also against distracting, conformist, or utopian tendencies within his own household"[7] — but it is not clear how this stance was possible given a view of theories as cultural symptoms.

Horkheimer's answer was that Critical Theory develops the concepts appropriate for the present by demanding a transformation of society

6. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York; Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 200.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

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as a whole and connecting itself to that struggle. The answer was to reformulate the traditional Marxist unity of theory and practice by putting the emphasis on the idealist side of that doctrine rather than the more common interpretation, at least at that time, of strategic or tactical aspects. The unity of theory and practice was the precondition for the freedom from ideological bias and functional reproduction of social relations in Critical Theory, as opposed to traditional theory.

But what distinguished Critical Theory from its traditional counterpart was not a purely intellectual matter. Rather, it demanded a political and moral commitment to an oppressed humanity. "In the materialist conception . . . the basic activity involved is work whereby knowledge and its object are constituted, . . . does not take place therefore in a purely intellectual world, but coincides with the struggle for certain real ways of life."[8] It is not difficult to understand why Horkheimer would end up such a bitter anti-Marxist. His defense was problematic. It eventually dawned on Horkheimer, as it had on many before him, that if the basic commitment was a moral one, concerning the identification with an oppressed humanity, then no particular theoretical agenda either followed from that commitment nor was necessarily linked to it. That is not to say that the two problematics are wholly unrelated, but it is to say that explanations and moral commitments follow different logics of analysis and finally of revision.

Marx noted that though he did not paint the capitalist *couleur de rose* in his economic analysis, he also did not connect the explanation of social action with holding the capitalist responsible for those social relations which, in Marx's view the capitalist's actions embodied. Whether Marx went too far in seeing people as mere "bearers" of social relations is not the point. To collapse problems of social explanation with a moral commitment to struggle against oppression is just as misguided as to erect an unbridgeable gulf between these attitudes. Explanation requires a flexibility and adaption to data that moral commitment precludes. The answer is not to make theoretical analyses even more rigid, but to keep the two kinds of questions distinct. An intelligible social explanation does not guarantee that one will *act* correctly in any given situation and is compatible with diverse moral positions. For the unity of theory and practice to deny these important points is to revive the determinism and reduction inherent in traditional Marxism.

Given the failures inherent in Horkheimer's version, it was left to Adorno to salvage the distinctiveness of Critical Theory while allowing the Marxist apparatus to gradually wither away.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

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Adorno

In Adorno's writings, history always casts a "spell upon" or embeds itself in concepts and theories. Adorno's strategy, in the face of this material "weight," was negative; it was to resist both sociology of knowledge *and* objectivism. The name for this research strategy was non-identity. To use some current language, this makes Adorno a critical realist, and thus again makes of him an odd bed-fellow with Popper in current intellectual debates. Adorno's "realism," or irreducibility of the object, does not appeal to any scientific grounds for asserting that our present theories are accurate representations of reality. Nor is it a realism maintained on common sense grounds of our beliefs concerning the independence of external objects or causation. Rather, like Popper, Adorno's realism is critical or metaphysical: it is used as a wedge against reductionism and subjective idealism.

Adorno's non-identity thesis argued for the autonomy of the object, its irreducibility, against subjectivity, against sociology, and against historicity. But, at the same time, this irreducibility of the object could not be studied directly but only as conceptual forms imposed upon it in various historical modes of representation. These concepts were in effect micro-institutions, riddled with historicity and crippled by social constraints. The task of Critical Theory was to read this "sad" history in the archaeology of conceptual forms without reducing the object to just forms of subjectivity.

Thus Adorno's study of Husserl, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, struggles to reveal the social and historical "spell" cast upon the Husserlian project, which is what Adorno calls his "metacritique." But Adorno refuses to go fully into sociology and still maintains that there is a "truth" in epistemology as it strives to transcend the particularity and "curse" of historical limitations. This effort at transcendence is then linked to all utopian longing by Adorno. In this way Adorno surreptitiously reintroduces the unity of theory and practice Horkheimer demanded, minus its orthodox Marxism.

But Adorno did not succeed in this effort to balance historicity and knowledge. In specific analyses, such as the account of the separation of mental and physical states in the famous article, "Subject-Object," Adorno's explanation is wholly sociological. He holds, for example, that the separation of the mental and physical is both true and false on sociological grounds. What is false is that the separation objectifies concepts or ontologizes a transitory distinction as invariant. But what is true is that it correctly "expresses" a real separation in a "coerced" and fragmented humanity. Notice that the truth here is the sociological expression, the false appearance.

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Thus we are back with Horkheimer's moral commitment. The problem is not the old chestnut about separating fact and standards since, of course, standards are necessary for all knowledge (which does not mean they are the same as facts, since that leads to another form of reduction and objectivism). But the problem resides in the sociological "expression-effect" that Adorno uses as an analysis of all theoretical systems and concepts. Such a mode of analysis leaves no autonomy for theory and thus no room for criticism, all Adorno's protests to the contrary. The position cannot survive a self-reflection that makes the categories of Critical Theory itself adequate social expressions. Adorno's effort to introduce a hiatus or non-identity between theory and practice, subject and object, text and context did identify and try to correct the weakness in classical Critical Theory. But the hiatus was merely a strategy which in no way challenged the sociological reduction that would always take its revenge on Critical Theory. Popper's warnings about the "myth of the framework" were much more telling for Critical Theory than for Kuhn, simply because Kuhn did not claim a distinct form of theory and thus did not exempt his own theorizing from his analysis of presuppositional frameworks.

Rational Reconstruction

Popper holds that "it is the central point of situational analysis that we need, in order to 'animate' it, no more than the assumption that the various persons or agents involved act *adequately, or appropriately*; that is to say, in accordance with the situation . . . we assume no more than that . . . they 'work out' what was *implicit* in the situation."[9]

A substantive account of rationality demands not just this consistency but that the beliefs or intentions are substantively rational, meaning either grounded in evidence, formed in certain specified ways, or part and parcel of a certain collective rationality of the social systems, institutions, practices or rules. It is clearly very difficult to come up with substantive theories of rationality that do not ontologize historical criteria. The second generation of Critical Theory, starting with Habermas, tried to defend and rehabilitate substantive theories of rationality and ethics, given their assumption that substantive theories were the only weapon against relativism and formalism (the equivalent of the instrumental in this view). These assumptions are questionable, and Popper is right in insisting that the theory be formulated on the thinnest grounds of rationality so as to be as superficial and empty as possible. One might say this thinness is the moment of relativism that

9. Popper, "The Rationality Principle," *Popper: Selections*, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

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allows such a theory to apply to widely different social and situational contexts. To make the concept of rationality more substantial would be to narrow the range of cases to which it can apply.

But rational reconstruction, even in its formal sense, can be enriched by a theory of ideology in two ways. As Adorno argues in his "Introduction" to the methodology dispute, an "empathetic reconstructability . . . ignores the power of the necessarily false consciousness which society imposes upon its members."[10] First, ideology can be understood as "hypocrisy," wherein the beliefs or attitudes that explain and thus bring about the action are not the set that the agent acknowledges or professes to have. Hypocrisy thus demands some interpretive strategies of reconstruction which alter or adjust what an agent avows as a belief system against the total context of their action. The overall effort is captured in a phrase from Charles Sanders Pierce "It is the belief men betray and not that which they parade which has to be studied."

The second aspect of ideology, which Adorno often eludes to, is a functional theory of reproduction or reinforcement of institutions, practices and rules through some belief system. The analysis of the culture industry that has now become the defining characteristic of the Frankfurt School in contemporary thought is an account which hopes to show how there is a functional compatibility of various moral, religious, sexual and cultural beliefs with structures of the economy or power.

But it is very easy to be mislead here, as the history of Marxism shows and the proliferation of so-called "oppression" studies of racism or sexism constantly demonstrate. Conspiracy theories and explanations which attribute, without argument or evidence, the unintended byproducts of action as one of the agent's intentions grow out of an exaggerated use of ideological analysis and the mistaken assumption that a functional, ideological analysis of action is to that extent an explanation of action.

Criticism of Popper

In summary, Popper's rational reconstruction or situational analysis led him to a series of conclusions. He rejected conspiracy theories, stressed that all actions have unintended, uncontrolled and unplanned consequences and that all reconstructions are guided by some preconceived, selective viewpoint. But Popper misunderstood his approach in a way that lends support to a series of criticisms Adorno made of positivist methodology in his debate with Popper. In *Poverty of Historicism*, Popper argues for the possibility of non-historicist laws in the

10. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

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social sciences. For Popper, a law asserts that "such and such a thing cannot happen." In effect, it is a statement of a prohibition such as "you can't carry water in a sieve." Popper then comes up with several examples, off the top of his head, of what he considers social scientific laws.[11] Since most of the examples are either clearly false or hopelessly vague, they are not worth discussing. But at least one deserves attention: the statement "you cannot have full employment without inflation."

Whatever truth there is in this statement would have to be qualified by saying that no "reasonable" government measure could exclude the wage-push inflation of full employment. But if this statement were genuinely a law it would not merely apply to governments but to all human action. However, that is clearly not a viable reading of this statement since, though it says that efforts to better oneself through employment are perhaps limited given some situation, it certainly is still possible and advisable for individuals to strive for that very improvement or to change the "rules of the game." It remains intelligible to ask, in the given situation, "ought I to seek employment?" This statement is then not an example of a law at all, but a solidified social rule or "institutional logic," since it captures the constraints of institutions and situations on human agency. Such constraints are not natural laws, which make some behavior impossible, rather they are the practical limits of action given the situation. Thus Popper's hope to unify the natural and social sciences has him, as Adorno puts it, make of social structure's "reified objectivity" a law.

Popper's situational analysis could accommodate this Adornoesque criticism. For example, a bureaucracy could be described as having an institutional logic that demands both accountability and secrecy from its "apparatchiks," putting them often into a kind of "double bind." Thus the *necessity* in these kinds of social actions, also often felt as a contradiction to the agent, is institutional, not lawful, and thus, in that sense, what Critical Theory calls an historical appearance. Of course, the "belief" in social laws remains part of the problem situation, as reconstructed, and thus partly explains the agent's action.

Criticism of the Frankfurt School

Rational reconstruction captures some important themes of Critical Theory; the separation of the social and natural sciences, ideology as an explanation by reasons, the rejection of empiricism and psychologism in social science, and the impossibility of a "social physics." However, Critical Theory carried on a package of assumptions from the Marxist tradition which haunted its analyses, politics, and concepts. Consider

11. Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, *op. cit.*, p. 61f.

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one of the central dogmas of Critical Theory: the unity of theory and practice. In the above model, one consequence is that no set of reasons ever fully determines action. It is always possible to have done otherwise and remain within the weak constraints of the rationality principle. The point is not to try to make rationality more substantive so as to exclude certain actions but to admit that action is always underdetermined.

Action is only determinate and necessary *after the fact*, and the only way to salvage or preserve the traditional Marxist project of actions "necessitated" by theory or a theory which can designate the "correct" action in a given situation is to subtly convert actions into behavior. Thus there is an intimate connection between a Marxist commitment to historical laws and political programs of central management. Though Critical Theory rejected lawfulness and traditional materialism, by means of an analysis of historical appearance, it remained committed, through the effort to maintain the distinction between traditional and Critical Theory, to the unity of Critical Theory with a moral and political practice or commitment.

This link between theory and practice in Critical Theory is often defended as a struggle against instrumentalism or decisionism. In other words, the effort to prevent theory from being operationalized by society, to defeat the magical spell of instrumental rationality, requires that theory be self-conscious about its link to practice. That point is not at issue, rather the problem is that instrumentalism is blocked at the cost of attempting, inconsistently, to maintain a tight link between theory and political practice (also necessary to exclude traditional theory) while still proclaiming the autonomy of theory (necessary to exclude operationalism).

Adorno shared Popper's opposition to historicism 1 as expressed in Adorno's phrase "the autonomy of social process . . . is grounded in reification." But this autonomy is to be contrasted with the possibility to conceptualize a different framework from that which exists and thus experience the existing conceptual scheme as a problem. As Adorno says, criticism requires the ability to conceptualize another social form. But Critical Theory attempted to control the many different conceptualizations of social forms by some non-negotiable issues of justice or oppression. More skeptically, Popper holds that no pre-selected viewpoint has any *intrinsic* superiority over another.

Again, the objection may be that Popper opens the door to operationalism, instrumentality, and relativism (Popper is only willing to grant that, at some point, argument fails and it is impossible, for example, to rationally demonstrate the value of argument to an opponent who will not make the necessary presupposition), but the point here is that no

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alternative, without introducing massive problems, appears able to rule out such possibilities in theory alone and, at any rate, the threat of instrumentalism should be taken as more of an empirical than an *a priori* issue. The operationalism of theory is decided upon by not simply consulting the form of the theory itself but by examining its function and context.

Adorno makes the enigmatic, but probably defensible claim, that sociological knowledge cannot be imperative-free (*Sollensfreies*). He then, in typical style, adds; "The separation of evaluative and value-free behavior is false in so far as value, and the value-freedom, are reifications: correct, in so far as the behavior of the mind cannot extricate itself at will from the state of reification."[12] This argument can be restated so as to reaffirm the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive claims. To fail to make that distinction at all, which is not what Adorno is arguing, would be to accept such dangerous ethical reductionist projects as sociobiology. But evaluative or prescriptive claims are not, any more than factual claims, merely the whims of human choice. We confront standards as we confront an external world. Adorno then holds out the hope that, in a society freed from reification, standards would no longer be distinct from facts. It sounds like Adorno entertains Lukács's dream, in *The Theory of the Novel*, of an ancient world in which people found their ethics directly in their experience of everyday life.

Thus the utopian possibility actually removes the role of critical thinking since in that society, in the words of Popper, "truth is manifest." Thus the fundamental contrast between Adorno and Popper is that Adorno takes Critical Theory as an historical "curse," as a burden from which humanity will eventually be freed once a utopian social transformation succeeds, whereas Popper sees critical thinking as the single invariant of human rationality and especially as our only reliable weapon against the continual appeal of utopianism, dogmatism, and certainty.

Adorno's central argument is worth quoting in full: "Criticism implies demythologization. This, however, is no mere theoretical concept . . . Whatever enlightenment achieves in the form of disenchantment it must necessarily desire to liberate human beings from such spells — formerly from that of the demons, nowadays from the spell which human relations exert over them. An enlightenment which forgets this, which disinterestedly takes the spell as given and exhausts itself in the production of utilizable conceptual apparatuses sabotages itself, along

12. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

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with the very concept of truth. . . . The just organization of society is incorporated in the emphatic concept of truth without being filled out as an image of the future."[13]

Certainly there is no tolerance here for the mere relativism of proliferating conceptual schemes, and Adorno strives to salvage the concept of truth as a weapon of criticism, even if truth remains a "longing" for something not yet "filled out." But classically Adorno argues that enlightenment "must necessarily desire" liberation. Explicitly, he introduces this point in linking a specific moral commitment or political practice to theory. This move is also the motivation behind Habermas' late attempt at an ethics based on the presupposed commitments of all rational argument. But this entire line of argument, whether transcendental or historicist, is an exercise in striving for certain "guarantees," due to a lingering misconception, that Critical Theory inherited from Marxism, about the goal of social explanation. In this sense, classical Critical Theory is the last gasp of 19th century philosophy of science.

13. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-22.

Critical Theory in Political Practice

Stephen T. Leonard

The social sciences, according to advocates of critical theory, must play a role in changing the world so as to help emancipate those on the margins of society by providing them with insights and intellectual tools. In a provocative study of critical social theory, Stephen Leonard takes these emancipatory goals as standards against which critical theory must be judged.

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*Adorno's Anti-Avant-Gardism**

Peter Bürger

The Limits of Adorno's Aesthetics

Adorno's aesthetic theory is an easy target today. Critics object that he reduced art "to the common denominator of negativity," thereby "leaving out its communicative functions." They expose the latent theological character of his aesthetics which juxtaposes art as the other to reality. Finally, they find that art in Adorno's thought occupies the same place as the proletariat in leftist theories.[1] Many who learned critical thinking from Adorno now feel the need to create room for innovative thought by breaking with Adorno. This is especially important in relation to Adorno's apocalyptic views (e.g., his premise of a system of universal obscurantism). Such judgments, however, are problematic. By reducing Adorno's aesthetics to one simple category (negativity) or discovering something else beyond it, critics search for a way to stand it on its head. But in so doing, they miss what is most important, i.e., disclosing the nature of a dialectical reflection which continually

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* The following analysis elaborates certain reflections first outlined in my *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. In the foreword to the English translation of that work (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 7-47. Jochen Schulte-Sasse has proposed a distinction between modernism and the avant-garde which is crucial to this essay.

1. Cf. the four articles in *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie: Theodor W. Adornos Konstruktion einer Moderne*, ed. by Burkhard Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979) by Hans Robert Jauß, "Negativität und ästhetische Erfahrung: Adornos ästhetische Theorie in der Retrospektive," pp. 142-43; Dieter Kliche, "Kunst gegen Verdinglichung: Berünrungspunkte im Gegensatz von Adorno und Lukács," pp. 219-60; Hartmut Scheible, "Die Kunst im Garten Gethsemane: Äesthetik zwischen Konstruktion und Theologie," pp. 348-65; and Karl Markus Michel, "Versuch, die 'Ästhetische Theorie' zu verstehan," pp. 41-107.

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challenges its own results. It is thus not surprising that an exegetical treatment of Adorno's works has accompanied the new criticism.[2] Critical works exploring Adorno's relation to idealist philosophy, to Weber's and Durkheim's sociology, or to Freudian psychoanalysis remain the exception. While general presentations of the relation between aesthetics and philosophy testify to the ongoing fascination with Adorno's thought, critics claim his aesthetics is no longer valid. Instead of pointing out the historical limits of Adorno's aesthetics, however, they allegedly discover systemic errors and question its relation to truth.

Historical criticism proposes a different approach. It does not deny the truth of the theory, but locates its epochal limits. Expressive as well as engaged artworks cannot be adequately dealt with within the context of his aesthetics. It is virtually impossible to deny the tradition of an unmediated expressive art or a literary engagement from Brecht to Peter Weiss. Thus we must acknowledge blind spots in Adorno's construction of modernism. The rigor with which Adorno reduces the number of outstanding works from our century to a few (Proust, Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett in literature, Schönberg and the Schönberg school in music) owes much to a limited concept of art, which is becoming increasingly problematic. Adorno presupposes that in bourgeois society there can be only one artistic material which is historically most advanced. He often shows how this predicament comes about in music. At least since the advent of the historical avant-garde, it has become increasingly difficult to privilege *one* material over all others. Thus, Neo-Realism in painting cannot simply be pushed aside by claiming it uses regressive materials. Adorno's thesis that artistic material has a logical development can be understood as part of construction of an historically grounded modernism. This also applies to Adorno's criticism of mass culture. As productive as the concept of culture industry turned out to be, the thesis of a total reification in late-capitalist society prevented Adorno from discovering even the possibility of a different type of art within mass culture. His analysis lacks the dialectic quality he relentlessly demanded of others.

It could be argued that these limits were external to Adorno's theory, and can be removed by a broader interpretation of his concept of art. This is not the case. On the contrary, the limits of Adorno's theory have their historical and systemic basis in his anti-avant-gardism.

2. Cf. Peter Christian Lang, "Kommentierte Auswahlbibliographie 1969-79," *Ibid.*, pp. 509-56, especially 522ff.

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Modernism and the Avant-Garde

If modernism and the avant-garde are considered synonymous, the thesis of Adorno's anti-avant-gardism would be unintelligible. It is essential, therefore, to distinguish the two. The development of art in bourgeois society favors such a discrimination. Modernism and the avant-garde can be seen as different developments of art after 1850. At the risk of overextending the comparison, it could be argued that modernism is analogous to 1789 and the avant-garde to 1793: the latter representing a consequent and at the same time aporatic radicalization of modernism.

According to Valéry, modernism is part of the process of differentiation and specialization of human labor typical of bourgeois society.[3] In the same way that individual disciplines are established by delimiting a certain field of study, modern poetry is divorced from theoretical knowledge as well as practical morality. Only such a restriction allows poetry to concentrate on its proper function: "In truth, a poem is a sort of machine to produce the poetic state from the center of the word."[4] Shocking because of its anti-romantic tone, this remark indicates that for Valéry modern poetry accepts the principle of rationality. Unlike the romantic protest against the rationalization of social life, modern poetry absorbs this tendency. Yet it rejects those impulses emphasized in Victor Hugo's romantic poetry: self-expression and moralism. Thus *refus* becomes the modern artist's central principle: not only a refusal of romantic motives but of any solution, which is the result of chance. In one of his essays on Mallarmé, Valery writes that *refus* and a rational choice between various artistic means are manifestations of the same behavior.[5]

Adorno took up and elaborated Valéry's ideas in his theory of modernism. This is obvious when he speaks of a "rationality in relation to the material"[6] or when he discusses the principle of construction.[7] In Valéry there is also the opposite of rationality that Adorno evokes with concepts like chance and mimesis. One should not ignore, however, crucial differences between the two theoreticians. Unlike Valéry, Adorno does not see the use of artistic material in relation to it effects. Thus he attributes less significance to a rational choice of means. And while Valéry sought to cleanse poetry of metaphysical references,

3. Paul Valéry, *Oevres complètes*, ed. by J. Hytier (Paris: Bibl. de Pléiade, 1957/58), Vol. I, p. 1270.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 1337.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 641.
6. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by C. Lenhardt, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36 and 83-85.

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Adorno recognizes it as the last, even if fragile, refuge for an emphatic concept of truth. Nevertheless, a consistent concept of modernism can be extrapolated from similarities between the two.

Modern art is autonomous. It defends the demarcations first defined by idealist aesthetics and interprets it even more strictly than the theoreticians of aesthetic autonomy. Where Kant still recognized beauty as something experienced by the subject while contemplating the object, which could have other aspects besides its beauty, now the creation of a "pure" artistic structure becomes the producer's declared intention.

"Work" as a rational structure is the core of modernism. Thus it comes closer to the classical conception of art than explicit statements by its spokesmen indicate. The emphasis on the rationality of the creative process as well as the reserved, if not dismissive, attitude towards "expression," leaves modernism in an adversarial position towards romanticism, pointing again to a hidden proximity of classicism and modernism. Of Course, Valéry ruled out the possibility of completing a work. This belief was not grounded in a romantic admiration of fragments, but rather in his confidence in the force of rational artistic procedures.

As with the category "work," modernism has not really challenged "contemplative penetration" as the corresponding category in reception aesthetics. Since critical interest shifted away from reception to the work and the artistic material, however, the significance of reception has greatly diminished.[8] By emphasizing the rationality of the selection of artistic means, modernism minimizes only the conception of the artist as genius. Still, such a reduction could be interpreted as a return to a classical concept of art motivated by an anti-romantic impulse.

Yet, Valéry's concept of modernism conceals a moment of modern art which Adorno always emphasized: its protest against alienation in bourgeois society. Constrained by the inner aesthetic sphere, this motive escapes its institutional enclosure with avant-garde movements (dadaism, early surrealism, or Russian futurism). Always implicit in the most radical expressions of aesthetic autonomy (like Schiller's), the claim to change our lives is now extended to the institution of art itself. Its separation from individual reality appears as what prevents art from becoming praxis. "Qu'on se donne seulement la peine de *pratiguer* la poésie" is the central statement of the 1924 *Premier Manifeste du surréalism*.[9]

8. The paths of Adorno's reception theory are followed in my study *Vermittlung — Rezeption — Funktion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 124-33.

9. André Breton, "Manifeste du surréalism," *Manifestes du Surréalism* (Paris: Collection Idées 23, 1979), p. 28.

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The Surrealists' dada action and *écriture automatique* are examples of an avant-garde artistic practice, which differentiates itself from modernism by negating still valid aesthetic categories. This is especially true for "work." As the seal of *écriture automatique*, the writer's self-expression tends to negate the work. At the same time, however, rational choice between various means is eliminated. *Écriture automatique* does not subscribe to the principle of *refus* but to spontaneity of expression. That the surrealists take up the romantic conception of self-expression indicates that this second phase of modernism tries to integrate premodern motives. The avant-garde challenges the modern principle of aesthetic purity as well, since it follows bourgeois society in a progressive differentiation and a rigorous division of occupational fields. A dada manifestation can become symbolic-political action. For the writer, writing an automatic text is an act of liberation (even if only a momentary one): Breton's prose is characterized by a moralistic pathos which does not obliterate its aesthetic claims. The politics, psychology and moralism, which modernism tried to separate from the aesthetic sphere, are reintegrated. Their differentiation is no longer accepted because it is recognized as *one* among other causes of alienation in bourgeois society.

The avant-garde movements' reception of the art work is not totally opposed to modernism but, rather, radicalizes a tendency already implicit within it. Modern works also often meant to shock the recipient. This, however, is only the first reaction, which must be followed by a contemplation of the work. On the other hand, dada manifestations do not allow for such contemplation, but try to intensify the shock in order to change immediately the receiver's attitude.

Of course, there is continuity between modernism and the avant-garde, as can be seen in the development of some avant-garde artists. Duchamp was an important cubist printer before he exhibited his ready-mades, which initiated a still on-going process of self-reflection in art. When he was young, Breton wrote poems inspired by Mallarmé and Rimbaud. But something else is more important. In modernism, the avant-garde impulse goes beyond aesthetics. Modernism draws a line of demarcation, be it for the idea of aesthetic purity or a belief that the work's provocative content can only be recovered in this fashion. The avant-garde seeks to abolish this demarcation. This explains their divergent attitudes towards the culture industry and popular literature. Whereas modernism is anxious to preserve the aesthetic sphere and to reject popular literature as a whole, the avant-garde finds many starting

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points in it. It discovers collective anxieties and hopes in the trivial — something it takes up and estranges in montage.

Even the controversy between Adorno and Benjamin concerning mass art — a controversy usually considered to have been political, makes sense if seen in terms of the underlying aesthetic model. While Adorno presupposes a concept of modernism modelled after Schönberg, Benjamin's point of departure in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is his interpretation of the aesthetic praxis of dadaism and surrealism. Thus, Adorno pleads for a "reference to the traditional aesthetic concepts" of idealist aesthetics,[10] whereas Benjamin seeks a "critique of the concept of art handed down from the nineteenth century."[11]

Recovering Semblance/Appearance

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin criticized a traditional concept of auratic art. Aura can be compared to a believer's attitude towards religious cult objects. According to Benjamin, there is a loss of aura in the 20th century. More important than the traditional explanation of this loss, which Benjamin provides in terms of the psychology of perception, is the relation between a loss of aura and the avant-garde technique of inserting leftover everyday life fragments in the art work. By composing poems out of language fragments and mounting buttons or tickets onto a painting, the dadaist achieves "a disrespectful destruction of the aura of their creation." Today we would say they meant to destroy the aura. Thus, the avant-garde challenged the central categories of idealist aesthetics which are still accepted by modernism: the idea of the work in which all parts are formed and in which form and content constitute an unmediated unity. Contemplation presupposes a reception of the work according to the idealist model of the unity of subject and object.

In the chapter on the phantasmagorical in his book on Wagner, Adorno maintains a connection with Benjamin's thought. What he criticizes as the phantasmagorical character in Wagner's operas is "the concealment of its creation by the appearance of the product."[12] Works of art are part of the phantasmagorical insofar as all traces of their creation have been erased. Thus, they appear as a self-contained

10. Adorno, *Aeshetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

11. Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomenon . . . ," *Illuminations*, ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

12. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981).

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reality — a higher reality. Whereas with the concept of aura Benjamin focused on the receiver's institutionalized attitudes towards art works, Adorno's criticism focused on the moment of untruth in the category of aesthetic semblance. Aesthetic semblance as illusion deceives the recipient by presenting the unreal as absolute reality. Both authors are concerned with a criticism of idealist aesthetics insofar as it sets the rules for production and reception of art works in bourgeois society.

When in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno returns to the issue of semblance, he first seeks to recover it. Accordingly, criticism of the phantasmagorical is underemphasized in relation to the criticism of the avant-gardist rebellion against semblance. His central argument is that "in the aftermath of that rebellion, however, art is now at the point of falling back into mere materiality, as though it were being punished for its arrogant desire to be more than art."[13] Clearly, Adorno locates a problem with the neo-avant-garde when he points to regression into mere thingness. Outside of the institutional context of exhibitions and museums, which makes them into art works, everyday objects turn out to be mere things.

As early as in his letter to Benjamin concerning "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Adorno objects to the radical critique of auratic art. At the same time he acknowledges "that for many years the objective of a 'liquidation of art' was behind [his] aesthetic experiments."[14] The solution he finally reaches in *Aesthetic Theory* contains a clear renunciation of avant-gardist "rebellion against semblance." "Today, in modern art the sense of discomfort with aura is practically universal. Yet, this sensitivity blends with a latent inhumanity ready to break out again. Phantasmagorical guilt is inextricably bound with such renewed aggression in art towards reification and the atrocious literalness of what aesthetically are empirical data. As soon as the art work frantically fears for its purity to the point where it loses faith in this ideal, disgorging what no longer qualifies as art (i.e., canvas and mere sound material), it becomes its own enemy, for it continues directly and falsely the sway of purposive rationality. The so-called artistic happening is the result of this development. The validity of the revolt against illusion and its invalidity — namely the false hope that aesthetic illusion might be able to pull itself out of the morass by its own bootstraps — are inseparable from each other."[15] For Benjamin, a critique

13. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

14. Adorno's letter to Benjamin from April 19, 1936. Theodor W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 126-27.

15. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

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of aura was part of his attempt to eliminate concerns such as genius, eternal values and secrecy in the theory of art, since they proved useful for fascist cultural propaganda. Adorno's metacriticism of a "discomfort against aura" is therefore extremely serious, in that he accuses it of falling back into what it criticizes. Adorno supports a rebellion against semblance as illusion, but this rebellion must under no circumstances destroy the separation between art and life. The rigor with which Adorno rejects the critique of aura becomes intelligible only when we bear in mind that he is attacking the basic assumptions of his own aesthetics. For him art is either radically autonomous or not art at all. In order to cling to the autonomous status of art he needs the category of semblance, the recovery of which he calls "central to aesthetics."[16] Adorno's discomfort with any challenge the autonomy of art finds its clearest expression in his interpretation of the avant-gardist intention which he considers aestheticist. On the contrary, he does not strive for artistic purity but attempts to overcome it.

The avant-gardist attack on the autonomy of art was Benjamin's starting point for his thesis concerning the loss of the aura. In Adorno's view, this can only be a false sublation of aesthetic semblance, never the historical point of reversal whence to grasp the contradictions of art in bourgeois society. This is the core of Adorno's anti-avant-gardism. Adorno frantically attempts to insure that the border separating art from the rest is not violated, against the tendencies of collapsing art into action (dadaism), expression (expressionism), and the revolution of everyday life (surrealism).[17] Since he cannot conceive of the attempt to return art to praxis as a necessary step in the development of art in bourgeois society, but can only proclaim a regression into barbarism, his critique of idealist aesthetic categories ends in their recovery. This is equally true for the category of semblance. He incorporates insights of the critique of the phantasmagorical into his *Aesthetic Theory*,[18] without having any effect on the recovery of semblance. "Illusion, which proclaims the ineffable, does not transform works of art literally into epiphanies, no matter how difficult it may be for genuine aesthetic experience not to believe that the absolute is present in authentic works of art. This faith is awakened by great art."[19] Although the words are carefully selected, here it is clear that Adorno recovers what he criticized in his book on Wagner: the idealist claim that art is a reality *sui generis* — an appearance of the absolute.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

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Adorno's Critique of Avant-Gardist Techniques

In the chapter on Stravinsky in *Philosophy of Modern Music* Adorno has provided a sharp definition of the avant-garde. There, he objects not only to the neo-classical Stravinsky, but especially to his early works connected with dadaism and surrealism.[20] Amazingly, this chapter comes close to Lukács aesthetics.[21] They not only share a devastating critique of avant-gardist art as imitating neurotic behavior, but also a normative attitude towards the organic concept of work in idealist aesthetics: "*L'Histoire du Soldat* ruthlessly weaves psychotic attitudes and behavior into musical configurations. The organic-aesthetic unity is disassociated . . . The inorganic aspect blocks every empathy and identification."[22] What Adorno is pointing out here is the norms of traditional aesthetics, i.e., the notion of organic unity between the whole and its parts. He does not even hesitate to apply questionable categories which he would otherwise indict as clichés. Without much ado, he claims that empathy is *the* adequate mode of reception, and criticizes the shortage of "usual proportions of balance."[23]

When Adorno identifies the essential features of the avant-garde art work it becomes obvious that his criticism is aimed at avant-gardist traits in the early Stravinsky's music. He blames it for "disorganization," while acknowledging its lack of organization as its organizational principle. He dislikes it because its effects have become independent, their "dissociation from the meaning of the whole."[24] In fact, these are significant aspects of a technique which centers on the principle of montage. He explicitly compares the musical language of *L'Histoire du Soldat* with "the dream montages which the surrealists constructed out of the residue of the wakeful day"[25] and deems them regressive in spite of an admitted proximity to Joyce: "According to psychology, the 'authoritarian personality' expresses an ambivalent attitude towards authority. Stravinsky's music thus turns up its nose at the music of our fathers."[26] This is more than a polemic against Stravinsky. Here Adorno condemns the avant-garde because its movements challenge the institution of art. He criticizes their radical protest as behavior

20. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 1980), pp. 135-219.
21. Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1962).
22. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-84.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

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which clings to authority and addresses a type of art which no longer adheres to the principle of organic unity. The analogous means of critical fragmentation are attacked along with montage: "The composition is realized not through development, but through the faults which permeate its structure."[27] This is no mere description, but evaluation. Adorno explicitly contrasts the "concept of a dynamic musical form which dominates Western music from the Mannheim school down to the present Viennese school"[28] to Stravinsky's refusal of development as regression.[29] He also condemns the central avant-gardist category of reception: shock. "Thus Stravinsky's shock music stands under the pressure of repetition."[30] The Vienna School also explores the change of a consciousness of time, but it does so "within the inner structure of music." On the other hand, by exploding continuity only externally, shock makes musical time equal to space. Here Adorno may be continuing his discussion with Benjamin, who pointed out the significance of shock as the intended effect of the avant-garde art work and even sought to discover it in Baudelaire's early modernism.

Is Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* also influenced by his anti-avant-gardism? Undoubtedly, there is no simple answer, since in his later writings Adorno tried to correct the systematically conditioned false judgments of his earlier works. This is the case for the undialectical recovery of George in his lecture on "Poetry and Society." In a later essay he contrasts it to a demonstration of the reactionary traits in George's poetry.[31] This is also true for his attempt to differentiate his polemics against engaged art[32] from "the conservative attacks upon tendentious and committed art."[33] Finally, this is also the case with his discussions of shock and montage in *Aesthetic Theory*, which are among the best

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 187.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 163.
29. I do not want to deny that in the *Philosophy of Modern Music* there are passages where Adorno describes the dissociation of the unity of the whole and its parts as the principle of modern artistic creation. But these passages are almost in each case connected with the idea of the organic work, mediated by its dissociation. "It is only in a fragmentary work that has renounced itself that the critical substance is liberated. This happens, to be sure, only in the decline of the hermetic work of art and not in the undifferentiated superimposition of doctrine and image as represented by archaic artworks." *Ibid.*, pp. 125-26.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 176.
31. Theodor W. Adorno, "George," *Noten zur Literatur IV*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 45-62.
32. Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," *Noten zur Literatur III*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), pp. 109-85.
33. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

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statements concerning this issue.[34] Adorno only needed to repress his negative evaluation of avant-gardist techniques in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* to expose the illuminating force of dialectical analysis.

The problem of Adorno's anti-avant-gardism, however, is not yet solved. The following passages reveal that even in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno clings to a traditional concept of art works. He only renounces his once excessively narrow interpretation. There is no doubt that the "objectivity of form . . . can be accomplished,"[35] and the work's "chance of surviving" is connected with it.[36] Behind a seemingly classicist demand for objectivity of form, the hope of the modern artist is to assure his proper transcendence via his work. This explains why Adorno tries to reconcile the avant-garde principle of fragment with classical harmony. "In acting out its inner dialectic, a work of art cannot help but portray that dialectic as being reconciled. That is what is aesthetically wrong with the aesthetic principle."[37] Thus, he claims that harmony is the key, albeit problematic, aesthetic principle. On the other hand, *Aesthetic Theory* contains a critique of the ideal of harmony by suggesting "that art has sold out to the administered world."[38] Adorno tries to smooth the antinomy by criticizing a hypostatization of the work as harmonic totality, and at the same time he supports retaining "the concept of harmony as a moment."[39] So far, Adorno's anti-avant-gardism merely broadens the range of the acceptable. Yet he takes back with one hand what he concedes with the other. What the passage on montage allows, mainly access of "debris of real life" into the art work,[40] is taken back later when Adorno determines that an art work leaves "no areas untouched by form."[41] The avant-garde can thus be defined as a type of art that takes in the unformed via the subject, and where the material becomes a moment of expression.

While Adorno clings to the category of "work,"[42] he launches a sharp critique against the idea of the artist as genius. He takes as his point of departure the insight that in genius, as an ideological category, truth and untruth are dialectical. Criticism then aims at distinguishing

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 222-25.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
42. In Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, however, Mephisto-Adorno appears as a devil hostile to works. Cf. Norbert Rath, *Adornos Kritische Theorie: Vermittlungen und Vermittlungsschwierickeiten* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1982), pp. 80ff.

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interrelated moments. While the concept of genius supports the attempt to furnish "the individual, in the limited area of art, a capacity for expressing something valid and authentic,"[43] Adorno points to its untruth in its disregard for mediation. The aesthetics of genius suppress the notion that artistic works are created, thereby supporting the irrational tendency to take it as the result of an unconscious act of creation. In the hypostatization of the artist as the creative genius, Adorno recognizes a devaluation of the art work at the center of his aesthetics. Where contemplation aims primarily at the personality of the artist (as in Goethe's case), the art work serves as a manifestation of his greatness.

Yet Adorno does not simply want to do away with the concept of genius, since this would imply a loss of spontaneity without which artistic production is in danger of degenerating into "craftmanship." In accordance with his privileging of the category "work," he would like to connect genius with the art work and not with its creator. "The ingenious is a dialectical knot signifying the presence of the unstencilled, the unrepeated, the free — in the midst of a sense of necessity."[44] At this point Adorno faces the danger of recovering even those moments of the concept of genius which he had himself criticized. The art work as a synthesis of freedom and necessity presupposes the artist-genius as its creator: the early Lukács was correct in pointing this out.[45]

The situation is different when Adorno tries to recover the utopian content of the idea of genius: "incidentally, when the idea of genius was launched in the late 18th century, it by no means had the mystique and charismatic flavor typical of it today. At that time everybody was considered to be a potential genius, provided he expressed himself in an unconventional way as part of nature."[46] I do not want to investigate further whether Adorno's position can be defended. The utopian granting of spontaneity to everybody is undoubtedly a way out of hypostatizing individual genius. The utopian idea that everybody should have a chance to create without limits, which became relevant once again within the context of the historical avant-garde movements, is not further developed by Adorno, since his aesthetics focuses on the concept of the great work of art as the guarantee of the artist's transcendence.

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43. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
45. "We took the work as a fact and are now facing the genius as the necessary presupposition of the possibility of its existence." George Lukács, *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst 1912-1914*, ed. by George Markus and Frank Benseler (Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterband, 1974), p. 76.
46. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

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Autopoiesis: Critique of a Postmodern Paradigm

Danilo Zolo

The theory of autopoiesis is meant to answer two questions: "what is a living system?" and "what is cognition?"[1] Before a "scientific" answer can be formulated, however, these questions require philosophical elaboration.[2] Today the philosophical dispute between mechanism and vitalism is over. Molecular biology, biophysics and biochemistry are concerned with the activity of animal and vegetable organisms,[3] and research is normally conducted without a rigorous definition of biological phenomena and "living systems."[4] In their theory of autopoiesis, Maturana and Varela seek to spell out "the necessary and sufficient condition of life," and this has aroused considerable interest.[5] Although they are experimental biologists, they believe they have found a philosophical solution.

Within experimental biology, Maturana and Varela's proposal is revolutionary. Autopoiesis exhibits the following characteristics: 1) it

1. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *De máquinas y seres vivos* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1973); Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoietic Systems* (Urbana: Biological Computer Laboratory, BCL Report 9, University of Illinois, 1975); Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel, 1980).
2. François Jacob, *Le jeu des possibles* (Paris: Pantheon Books, 1981).
3. Francisco J. Ayala and Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology* (London: Macmillan, 1974).
4. Brian R. Gaines, "Autopoiesis. Some Questions," in Milan Zeleny, ed., *Autopoiesis. A Theory of Living Organization* (New York: North Holland, 1981), pp. 147-8.
5. Zeleny, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-17.

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may be susceptible to empirical confirmation;[6] 2) it has serious epistemological consequences; and 3) it has implications for a variety of fields, from sociology to ethics and to politics.[7] The original formulation has been followed by various attempts to systematically apply autopoiesis to the social sciences. Thus, Luhmann has generalized "self-referential autopoietic systems" to psychic and social ones, and considers Maturana and Varela's work a decisive paradigm shift transcending Bertalanffy's classical General System Theory. Following Glanville's epistemology as well as Von Foerster and Spencer Brown's ideas,[8] he argues that the epistemological implications of autopoietic self-reference "revolutionize the classical epistemology of subject-object."[9] More recently, Heil, Willke and especially Teubner have attempted to use the autopoietic model for developing an evolutionary legal theory.[10] According to Teubner, this attempt leads to a reflexive approach to law;[11] for Luhmann, it is the basis for reformulating the problem of the unity and autonomy of modern legal systems.[12]

Both Luhmann and the reflexive law theorists use the autopoietic model to uphold a "neo-liberal" policy.[13] They interpret the crisis of the

6. Erich Jantsch, "Autopoiesis: A Central Aspect of Dissipative Self-Organization," in Zeleny, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-88; G. D. Guiloff, "Autopoiesis and Neobiogenesis," *ibid.*, pp. 118-25; Zeleny, *ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

7. See Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. xi-xxx.

8. See R. Glanville, "The Same is Different," *ibid.*, pp. 252-62; Heinz Von Foerster, *Observing Systems* (Intersystems Publications, 1984); and G. Spencer Brown, *The Laws of Form* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969).

9. Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt a/M.: Suhrkamp, 1984).

10. Peter Heil, "Die Theorie autopoietischer Systeme: Perspektiven für die soziologischen Systemtheorie," *Rechtstheorie*, No. 12 (1982); Helmut Willke and Gunther Teubner, "Kontext und Autonomie: Gesellschaftliche Selbststeuerung durch reflexives Recht," *Zeitschrift für Rechtssoziologie*, Vol. 6, No. 1(1984); and Günther Teubner, "Substantive and Reflexive Elements in Modern Law," *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1983).

11. Günther Teubner, "Evolution of Autopoietic Law," in Günther Teubner, ed., *Autopoietic Law: A New Approach to Law and Society* (New York: de Gruyter, 1988). Recently, Teubner has adopted some of the main elements of the autopoiesis. See Günther Teubner, "How the Law Thinks: Toward a Constructivist Epistemology of Law, *Law & Society Review* Vol. 23, No. 5 (1989).

12. Niklas Luhmann, "Closure and Openness: On Reality in a World of Law," *ibid.*, pp. 335-48; "The Unity of the Legal System," *ibid.*, pp. 12-35.

13. Teubner, however, explicitly denies this allegation concerning his contribution to autopoietic theory. See, "Evolution of Autopoietc Law," *ibid.* See also "After Legal Instrumentalism? Strategic Models of Post-Regulatory Law," *International Journal of Sociology of Law* Vol. 12 (1984). See also Christian Joerges, "Politische Rechtstheorie and Critical Legal Studies: Points of Contact and Divergencies" in Joerges and Trubeh, eds., *Critical Legal Thought: An American-German Debate* (Baden-Baden: Nanos, 1989), p. 632.

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welfare state in terms of the loss of the law's regulating ability. Accordingly, legislation invades private spheres as well as other functionally differentiated and autonomous sub-systems. In doing so, the welfare state's interventionist strategy overloads the law to the point of distorting its regulatory function. This overload results in chaotic legislation which complicates the legal system and prevents its rational self-reproduction. Against this, Luhmann and the reflexive law theorists defend the autopoietic autonomy of social sub-systems — particularly those concerning the economy, education, and family life. Thus, the autopoietic paradigm supports *deregulatory* policies.

Autopoietic theorists assume circularity as a fruitful heuristic model.[14] According to Zeleny and Luhmann, autopoiesis provides the foundations of a new system theory, a new general sociology and a new epistemology[15] because of its ability to synthesize the new "circular" categories emerging in physics, biology and social sciences. As such, autopoiesis presents itself as the new paradigm of postmodern knowledge, valid both for the natural and the social sciences.

The Epistemological Status of Autopoiesis

In his introduction to *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, Maturana recalls a poem he wrote in 1948 as a first-year medical student.[16] This poem dealt with death and people's general indifference to it. These juvenile considerations led him to radical theoretical questions concerning life and knowledge. Thus, both for Maturana the adolescent poet and Maturana the animal neurophysiologist, the problem of life and knowledge arises as philosophical questions concerning nature and the meaning of each individual living form. What remains unchanged in the living being during his life, from birth to death? What is life, beyond *its contingent* features, such as reproduction, heredity, growth, irritability, etc? What makes a living being an autonomous entity? And what is knowledge in terms of a living individual? Is there an "objective reality independent of the observer"?

Research regarding the cognitive processes of animal organisms raises the epistemological problem of the objectivity of knowledge.

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14. R. H. Howe and Heinz Von Foerster, "Introductory Comments to Francisco Varela's Calculus for Self-Reference," *International Journal of General Systems*, No. 2 (1975), pp. 1-3; Francisco J. Varela, "A Calculus for Self-Reference," *International Journal of General Systems*, No. 2 (1975), pp. 5-24.

15. Zeleny, *op. cit.*, p. xv; and Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-29.

16. Maturana and Varela, *Autopoieis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. xi-xii.

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The question here is whether the cognitive processes of animal organisms are determined by the external world or by the nervous system itself.[17] According to Maturana the answer may be provided by biological research. His attitude is shared by Von Foerster and McCulloch.[18] They all advocate an *experimental epistemology* — the belief that the study of cognitive processes of superior animals can answer central questions in epistemology and philosophy of science.

As for the question "what is life?" Maturana and Varela argue that life is not defined by reproduction, heredity or adaptation,[20] which only affect the species but not the unity of the individual organism.[21] Rather, what characterizes life is the constancy of certain organizational relations among its constitutive elements. Organization is *self-referential* in the sense that processes are organized in terms of "the interaction of their own products."[22] These self-productive interactions constitute the condition "necessary and sufficient to characterize the organization of living systems"[23] and designate *autopoiesis*.

But how can this self-productive organization be determined within biological systems such as bacteria, viruses, etc.? Today there is still no way to ascertain whether viruses are living organisms or chemical entities (virus-proteins). Had this been possible, autopoiesis could have been empirically tested by means of an *experimentum crucis*.[24] Maturana and Varela, however, distinguish between "organization" and "structure" in such a way as to exclude the possibility of empirical falsification.[25] Autopoiesis affects the "organization," not the "structure" of living systems. Here "organization" refers to the scheme of the circular interaction between the system's components, while "structure" designates the concrete forms living systems assume in relation to the specific features of their components.

Thus Maturana and Varela argue that only the "structure" and not the "organization" of living systems "exist within physical space." The organization of living systems must be distinguished from their biology,

17. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
18. Francisco J. Varela, "Introduction," in Von Foerster, *op. cit.*, p. xvii; Von Foerster, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 184.
19. Zeleny, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
20. Humbereto R. Maturana, "Autopoiesis," in Zeleny, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9.
21. Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6, 115-8.
22. Maturana, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-2.
23. Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.
24. Gaines, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-48.
25. Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. xix-xx, 24-5.

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since organizations are "distinct, non-reducible domains."[26] Organization is what allows "biological phenomena to occur at all." However, Maturana and Varela note that "with autopoiesis alone we cannot characterize living systems as they appear." The phenomenology of biological organisms depends on their multiple interactions within the environment, and these "contingent factors" are the only things that can be observed by empirical biologists.

Autopoiesis as a General Theory of Life

Autopoiesis does not designate any specific feature of biological phenomena and cannot be identified either with the reiterative cellular loop, or with homeostatic mechanisms. Unity, autonomy and "closure" are not empirical features. Rather they are theoretical concepts synonymous with autopoiesis and self-production. The unity and autonomy of the living system is its self-referential organization.[27] Finally, organizational "closure" is seen as the main feature of the self-referential mechanism: being self-referential, the relations within the biological organism refer only to that organism and not to its environment or to other organisms.[28] According to Maturana and Varela, there is no contradiction between this and Bertalanffy's theory of "open systems."[29]

Thus, autopoiesis refers to a conjectural model for interpreting living processes — a model which generalizes the mechanisms of homeostatic self-regulation in biological organisms. From this viewpoint, autopoiesis should be evaluated on the basis of its heuristic value. It should not be regarded as an empirical, but as a conceptual entity. Maturana and Varela rule out any direct relation to biological research. At the same time, they consider autopoiesis necessary for the physical existence of living organisms. Thus, they construct a new epistemological doctrine.

The originality of the theory has been questioned.[30] It has even been dismissed as an empty tautology. Some critics have pointed out its incompatibility with evolutionary theory, whereas others argue that it cannot explain the general functions of control and coordination between

26. Maturana and Varela, "Introductory Remarks," in Zeleny, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
27. Maturana and Varela, *Autopiesis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. xiii, 9, 81.
28. Francisco J. Varela, "Describing the Logic of the Living," in Zeleny, *op. cit.*, p. 37; M. Zeleny, "What is Autopoiesis?," *ibid.*, p. 5; Maturana, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
29. L. von Bertalanffy, "The Theory of Open Systems in Physics and Biology," *Science*, Vol. 111, No. 2872 (1950).
30. Gaines, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

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different biological unities.[31] There is, however, a deeper philosophical problem: how can the autopoietic system ensure physical existence?

Autopoiesis as a New General Theory of Knowledge

Autopoiesis is an epistemological as much as a biological theory. Organizational closure is linked to cognitive and epistemological questions. Maturana and Varela are concerned with how an external observer can grasp the circularity of autopoietic organization since it is "closed" both with respect to the environment and other living organisms. Is knowledge an objective process or a representation?

Maturana and Varela dodge this question. They argue that not only are "living systems cognitive systems" but that "living as a process is a process of cognition."[32] Indeed, the study of animal neurophysiology shows that neuronal cells, like every other biological system, are organizationally "closed" (25). It is not possible to determine experimentally which is the input of a nervous system, even though the latter is "a strictly deterministic system" (46). There is no difference between states of nervous activity whose cause may be found within the nervous system, and states caused by external stimuli. In terms of "experimental epistemology," Maturana and Varela deduce that any feature attributed by a living system to an observed object belongs only to the observing system's "cognitive metadomain" and not to the observed system. Even the linguistic communication between different living systems is "intrinsically not informative" (120). For each living system the cognitive process "consists in the creation of a field of behavior through its actual conduct in its closed domain of interactionism and not in the apprehension or the description of an independent universe" (49).

Since what is valid for the neurophysiology of living organisms is also valid for the neurophysiology of *homo sapiens*, human knowledge is itself internal to *homo sapiens*' meta-domain. According to Maturana, this is an "ontological statement," because the logic of the description "is the logic of the describing (living) system and his cognitive domain" (39). This purely subjective logic refers to a "substratum," but nothing may be said of the latter: "reality as a universe of independent entities about which we can talk is, necessarily, a fiction of the purely

31. Edgar Morin, "Self and Autos," in Zeleny, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-36; Alexander M. Andrew, "Autopoiesis-Allopoieisis Interplay," in Zeleny, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-65; M. U. Ben-Eli, "Self-Organization, Autopoiesis, and Evolution," *ibid.*, pp. 169-80.

32. Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Hereafter page numbers will be indicated in the text.

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descriptive domain, and that we should in fact apply the notion of reality to this very domain of descriptions in which we, the describing system, interact with our description as if with independent entities" (52).

Every scientific explanation "lies in the domain of discourse." Thus, it is a paraphrase in which "the observer explains the observer" (39). Here the request to define the object of knowledge is meaningless since "there is no object of knowledge," and because "everything said is said by an observer" (xxii, 8). As thinking beings we live "in a domain of descriptions, as has already been indicated by Berkeley" (53). Knowledge is an activity without subject: it is simply "to be able to operate adequately in an individual or cooperative situation."

Autopoiesis is a "form" or an "idea." It must not be conceived either as a "constitutive condition" of empirical objects independent of observation, or as the precondition for the existence of living organisms. But here serious problems emerge. Maturana and Varela's idealistic metaphysics co-exists with deterministic premises which the two authors consider consistent with idealism. Their idealistic metaphysics is seen to be co-extensive with epistemological realism. But the main claim of epistemological realism is that the external world exists independently of cognitive processes. On this account, individuals observe and describe the objective features of the world — but do not create them. Surprisingly, in attempting to define the epistemological implications of autopoiesis, Maturana and Varela subscribe to this classic metaphysical argument.

Having repeatedly stated that their approach is "mechanistic," and having made no reference to forces and principles "not found in the physical universe," Maturana and Varela ironically claim that a scientific explanation is always "a reformulation of a phenomenon," i.e., they believe any explanation implies an observer: "it is central to distinguish what pertains to the system as constitutive of its phenomenology from what pertains to our domain of descriptions, and hence to our interaction with it" (55, 75).

The system's unity cannot be traced to the "domain of the observer." Rather, it is objectively constitutive of the existence and identity of living beings. At the same time, it is not empirically observable because every observation destroys it in some way (49). Thus, unity as a constitutive property of the living system is the "sole necessary condition for existence." But, on the other hand, when we refer to a concrete autopoietic system "we project this system upon the space of our manipulations and make a description of this projection. This we can do

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because we interact with the components of the autopoietic system through the properties of their constituting elements which do not lie in the autopoietic space. In turn, we modify the structure of the autopoietic system by modifying its components. Our description, however, follows the ensuing change of the projection of the autopoietic system in the space of our description, not in the autopoietic space" (88-90).

Exactly the opposite state of affairs applies for any notion other than autopoietic unity, e.g., identity or individuality. Thus, notions such as "development," "goal," "coding" and "transmission of information" belong to the domain of the observer, i.e., contrary to autopoiesis, they do not affect the observed system. In fact, they do not even belong to the "domain of the autopoietic organization of the living system" (54-55, 87, 90). One might object that the autopoietic organization is a pure conceptual entity. As such, the violation of the general idealistic framework of the autopoietic theory could be judged less severely.

This interpretation, however, is very problematic, because it is impossible to maintain that autopoiesis unity is a conceptual entity. On the contrary, they argue that there are instances in which this process is "physical" in nature. In these cases, unity is determined "through the actual working of its defining properties that assert its distinction from a background through their actual operation in the physical space." Therefore the "unity distinction . . . is not an abstract notion of purely conceptual validity for descriptive purpose, but it is an operative notion" (109).

Maturana and Varela advocate epistemological realism in even more naive terms when they maintain that the boundaries that autopoietic "machines" assume in the process of self-production do not depend on their interaction with the observer (80-81). Therefore, the observer must be able to "recognize the relations that define the system as a unity" and to "distinguish the boundaries which delimit this unity in the space in which it is realized." For Maturana and Varela, "the observer performs an operation of distinction that defines the limits of the system in the same domain in which it specifies them through autopoiesis. If this is not the case, he does not observe the autopoietic system as a unity," because "the observer makes a unity distinction which is not commensurate with the autopoietic system" (109).

Lastly, they explicitly reject the central thesis of idealism when confronting problems such as the general validity of scientific explanation, biological prediction and the scientific reliability of their autopoietic doctrine. Here they claim that "there is a universal logic, valid for all

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phenomenological domains" (121) and that with this logic they have elaborated the autopoietic theory in physical space. If their theory is valid, we may assume that physical space is "ontologically" a space in which the logic they used in their description is "intrinsically valid" (122). Predictions in physical space are valid because "a description, as an actual behavior, exists in a matrix of interactions which (by constitution) has a logical matrix necessarily isomorphic with the substratum matrix within which it takes place" (55, 122).

To clarify this claim, Maturana and Varela state that "living systems are an existential proof; they exist only to the extent that they can exist. Living systems are concatenations of processes in a mechanistic domain; fantasies are concatenations of descriptions in a linguistic domain. In the first case, the concatenated unities are processes; in the second case, they are modes of linguistic behavior" (122). However, instead of overcoming the difficulties of their idealistic option, they flagrantly contradict the central thesis of idealism. They forget that they have already argued that it is impossible to distinguish "between perception and hallucination in the operation of the nervous system" (xv.); that "reality" is mere linguistic fiction within the domain of description; that nothing can be said about the "substratum" of observation; that knowledge has no object and that everything that can be said is always said by an observer. Thus, it is meaningless to postulate the existence of a "logical isomorphism" between the substratum of the observation and the language of description.

"Epistemologia Imaginabilis"

Autopoeisis as an idealistic theory of knowledge is neither original, nor does it deal with contemporary epistemology. In the 1970s, Maturana and Varela wrote as if the post-positivist debate within American philosophy of science had not taken place. In other words, they did not elaborate a modern epistemology but, intead, developed a theory within the "gnoseological tradition" of Locke, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, et al. At the center of this tradition lie metaphysical problems concerning the objectivity of knowledge. While metaphysical problems retain a certain amount of speculative interest, modern science has long since either abandoned or cleverly dodged them.

Thus, there is no relevant argument for affirming or denying the objective existence of the "external world." Maturana's and Varela's indecisiveness in choosing between idealism and realism indicates 1) the scholastic nature of their original problems; 2) the positivistic naïveté

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with which they articulate methodological categories (such as "observation," "observer," "operation," "cause," "machine," etc.) and 3) a failure to overcome the realistic horizon of scholastic metaphysics and positivism through "experimental epistemology."

Maturana and Varela's epistemological approach treats the problem of knowledge as a biological problem and applies the results of neurophysiological research to epistemology. Von Foerster prophesies that "in the last quarter of this century biologists will force a revision of the basic notions that govern science itself."[33] In other words, modern science requires the elaboration of a "theory of the observer." Since "it is only living organisms which qualify as observers, this task falls to the biologist. However, the biologist himself is a living being; which means that in his theory he has not only to account for himself, but also for his writing this theory."[34]

The idea that contemporary biocybernetics substitutes for epistemology is based on the assumption that 1) observation (and, more generally, knowledge) is an activity characteristic of all biological organisms as such. Furthermore, 2) the neurophysiologist can analyse both the cognitive processes of other living beings as well as his own cognitive processes by using the same procedures. Thus, he can trace the circle of cognitive self-transparence and combine the subject and the object of observation. Lastly, 3) the neurophysiologist *qua* empirical researcher can account for his own theoretical activity and the task of "writing a theory" seen essentially as a biological operation.

The first and third assumptions may be accepted as part of a program of rigid biological reductionism. The second assumption is acceptable only if one is willing to place scientific knowledge on a level with psychological introspection or if one assumes that subjective knowledge begins with a *tabula rasa*. What is overlooked is the semantic and historical nature of linguistic, cultural and cognitive structures — something which today seems to be the main characteristic of symbolic processes.

The main problem with experimental epistemology is its "theory of observation," which seems inspired by Spencer Brown's "algebra of forms."[35] Accordingly, the original operation of every cognitive process is "indication." In the original operation the observer makes one "distinction," i.e., he selects one form from the context of other forms and makes it emerge as an "entity" or "unity." In so doing, the observer

33. Von Foerster, *op. cit.*, p. 258.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
35. George Spencer Brown, *The Laws of Form* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969).

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specifies the "domain of interactions" of the observed object with other objects. The class of all "relations" in which an entity can be observed is its "domain of relations" (8, 38-40, 41). The observer "defines himself as an entity by specifying his own domain of interactions" and is able to "always remain an observer of these interactions." Thus. all individual living systems can observe their own observation and describe their own descriptions in a recursive loop. Neurophysiology shows that these cognitive processes are rooted in the circular or "closed" organization of the nervous system and its cells. So it is possible to construct a general autopoietic epistemology excluding "magical" terms such as "consciousness, symbolization, information" (56).

This epistemology defines observation as self-observation and description as self-description and can thus overcome the classical dichotomy between subject and object of knowledge (121). Autopoietic theory generates, so to speak, an "experimental idealism" combining opposite and inconsistent philosophies such as positivism and idealism. According to Maturana (but not Varela), this epistemology has important consequences for ethics, social theory and politics.

The observer presupposed by this "experimental epistemology" is an imaginary observer. Every proposition of contemporary science has meaning only within the context of a specific scientific community. Analogously, every proposition concerning neurophysiology of *rana pipiens* and even *homo sapiens*' neurophysiology have meaning only within the context of a specific community of biologists. What the biologist perceives with his own eyes is seen with the eyes of the cultural group to which he belongs, since it is through this group that he has learnt to see, i.e., to recognize, select and represent.[36]

An epistemological analysis of the "subject" must have as its object not the brain of the *rana pipiens* or the retina of the pigeon, but rather the community of biologists. Varela seems to have realized as much. Having read von Wright, Radnitsky and probably Kuhn, he concludes that "not to make explicit the ways in which the *observer-community* participates in the constitution of a phenomenon is not only to forsake a complete understanding, but to be stuck with bad science."[37]

Today, a biologist or a biocybernetist dealing with the structures of the human *cerebrum* is conditioned by the "biases" of the scientific

36. Ludwik Fleck, *Erfahrung und Tatsache* (Frankfurt a/M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 59-83. See also Robert S. Cohen and Thomas Schnelle, eds., *Cognition and Fact. Materials on Ludwik Fleck* (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidl, 1986).

37. Varela, "Describing the Logic of the Living," *op. cit.*, p. 47, emphasis added.

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community to which he belongs as well as by the general biases of his culture. The cybernetic scheme of the neuronal structure is something which only fifty years ago biologists ignored; and which in fifty more years they will probably consider obsolete. In this regard, epistemology should investigate the meaning of empirical research, *qua* empirical research, about the structures of human thought. Others will make sense out of the results of this kind of investigation whereas no relevant answer can be offered by empirical research itself, which has quite different goals. It would be hyperrationalistic fallacy to maintain that it is experimentally possible to question the assumptions of an experimental research.

The point here is to distinguish between "reflexivity" and "circularity." Experimental epistemology is a perfectly closed circle of a single empirical observer's self-observation. But this "circle" is impracticable, since the neurologist is supposed to be able simultaneously to "observe" the retina of the *rana pipiens* and to "observe" himself studying the retina of the *rana pipiens*, probably even with the same instruments and procedures. This is an unacceptable epistemological thesis. To say that observation and self-observation are feasible because each case involves living organisms is to beg the question. Only on the basis of observation and self-observation could one eventually claim something about the observed objects and decide whether they are "living systems."

Even if we ignore the general symbolic context, the original cognitive operation is not the "distinction" of an object, i.e., its separation from an indetermined background. The individual observer is incapable of "describing" anything if he does not start from a holistic pre-cognition of the field of "observation." This pre-cognition enables the observer not to "define," "isolate" or "describe" one or more unities or entities, as Maturana thinks, but to interpret phenomena emerging from the whole observed field, by establishing among them very complex relations. At any rate, it is not possible to rigorously demarcate the field of observation. Therefore the cognitive subject is unable to define the domain of interaction of the object, let alone to define the domain of the interaction between himself and the object's interactions. From an explanatory and predictive viewpoint, notions such as "unity" and "entity," employed to denote a cognitive object, are useless in physics and in biology.[38]

38. See Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

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If we admit that observation necessarily implies holistic pre-cognition, then we must acknowledge that "observing" is not a simple operation. Observing always implies the application of some theory or complex of theories, and theories imply some "problems" which theories attempt to resolve. From a post-positivistic viewpoint "observation" is an operation much more complex and problematic than the empiricist and neo-empiricist tradition assumed. It implies a wide series of symbolic mediations, methodological decisions, interpretations and evaluations. Therefore, observation has very little in common both with the perceptive operation of "seeing" and with the positivistic idea of empirical observation and "description" as activities separate from theoretical elaborations and general philosophies. Furthermore, "observation" has little in common with foundations of immediate perceptions.[39] These are reasons for not accepting the argument that any living organism, vegetable or animal, is capable of "observation" or "description" in a sense which may be similar to symbolic and interpretative procedures of human knowledge.

Luhmann's Intervention: Autopoiesis as a Paradigm Shift

Luhmann's intervention opens a new chapter since he considers autopoiesis as the theory meant to produce a radical paradigm shift within the General Systems Theory and, more generally, within the epistemology of the social sciences. Luhmann proposes to free the notion of autopoiesis from its exclusive reference to living systems and redefines it as "the general form of system building using self-referential closure."[40] Accordingly, the existence of non-living autopoietic systems must be recognized together with the possibility of "different modes of autopoietic reproduction." Circularity and self-production characterize not only cells, nervous systems and biological organisms, but also psychic and social systems, which cannot strictly be considered living systems, but "meaning-using systems."[41] Autopoiesis ceases to be characterized as inextricably related to life and becomes a general category of "self-referential autopoietic systems."[42]

What is left of the original notion of autopoiesis? Luhmann assumes that psychic, social (and biological) systems are "self-referential" because

39. See Mary Hesse, "Is There an Independent Observation Language?," in Robert G. Colodny, ed., *Nature and Function of Scientific Theories* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970).
40. Luhmann, *Sozial Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, *op. cit.*, p. 24-9.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 24-9.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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their components are produced and reproduced by the system itself. This is Maturana's and Varela's decisive conceptual innovation. Self-reference is not only "structural" or "intentional," but it is "basic" (*basale Selbstreferenz*). It concerns the constitution of the elements of the system. Thus the classical opposition between "closed systems" and "open systems" is dropped. In psychic, social and biological systems openness to the environment takes place through the self-productive "closure." This paradox opens a new field of research for General System Theory and sociology.[43]

Luhmann further argues that the notion of self-reference entails "self-observation" and "self-description." Self-reference establishes which elements must be logically connected in order to permit the system's constitution and development. As in the case of the system/environment scheme, self-reference expresses a difference. In this case, the difference is not between the inside and the outside, but rather between "identity" and "difference." Identity takes place as a "difference between identity and difference," so that it becomes productive and dynamic. The theory of psychic and social systems can thus deal with the problem Hegel failed to solve "dialectically."[44] The difference between system and environment must be kept distinct from the difference between system and environment as obtaining inside the system. Of course, according to Luhmann "self-referential" psychic and social systems do not create "a material world of their own." Rather, whatever input they use as identity and difference, "is of their own making" and not from the outside world. Self-referential systems "are sovereign with respect to the constitution of identities and differences."[45]

Finally, the acceptance of self-reference in logic and epistemology transforms the premises of those practices.[46] In particular, the principle of self-reference has a tautological evidence which goes beyond logical deduction and causality.[47] Moreover, because knowledge is an operation of solving the tautologies of self-reference, it extends the limits of "normal scientific research, still subordinate to the traditional categories of

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 57-65; Niklas Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung*, III (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1981), p. 202; Luhmann, "The Autopoiesis of the Social Systems," *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

45. Luhmann, "The Autopoiesis of the Social System," *op. cit.*, p. 5.

46. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6.

47. Niklas Luhmann, "The Theory of Social Systems and Its Epistemology: Reply to Danilo Zolo's Critical Comments," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1986), pp. 132-23.

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empiricism, like causal hypotheses, statistical generalizations, binary schemes of classical logic."[48] The circular relations "revolutionized not only the classical subject-object epistemology; . . . *sie erzeugen auch ein sehr viel komplexeres Objektverständnis durch ein sehr viel komplexeres Theoriedesign*."[49]

Luhmann's re-elaboration of autopoiesis is based on the claim that psychic, social (and biological) systems have in common the ability of self-production and self-observation and that this fact poses problems which cannot be solved by the "normal" means of formal logic and empirical research. Thus, he attempts to define individual life, cognitive processes and social phenomena purely in biological terms. In this sense, Luhmann does not accept the program of "experimental epistemology." On the contrary, ignoring Varela's warnings,[50] Luhmann attempts to: 1) free autopoietic theory from any direct reference to biological and neurological phenomena; 2) generalize autopoiesis, circularity and systemic "closure;" 3) link "self-reference" to "self-description;" 4) see autopoiesis as an objective category of reality, as *basale Selbstreferenz*; 5) elaborate, alongside a general philosophy, an epistemology of self-reference.

In so doing, Luhmann uncritically accepts Maturana's and Varela's theory. While proposing a paradigm shift within Systems Theory, Luhmann considers the classical theory of open systems and the new theory of autopoiesis as equally well-founded. Since the two theories are incompatible, Luhmann does not hesitate to embrace the second. Yet, while General Systems Theory came out of a rich empirical basis, the same cannot be said for the theory of self-referential systems.

Luhmann's second introduction of biological theory into the sociology fails to exercise the same degree of scientific care as with General Systems Theory. He considers it "a safe enough theory" to allow an appreciation of "its consequences for a theory of social systems."[51] Thus, he embeds autopoiesis into his general theory without having dealt with its shortcomings. This is why the earlier criticisms are relevant even with regard to the philosophy of self-referential systems, especially those concerning the epistemological status of autopoiesis *qua* "closure" and "circularity;" and the shortcomings of the theory of observation and self-observation.

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48. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
49. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6.
50. Varela, "Describing the Logic of the Living," *op. cit.*, p. 38.
51. Luhmann, "The Autopoiesis of the Social Systems," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

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Maturana and Varela oscillate between incompatible options. Sometimes autopoiesis is idealistic metaphysics. At other times it is biological realism: it does not depend on the observer, but binds him to recognize it as an internal operation of the autopoietic organism, objectively constituting the unity of the system. Luhmann also oscillates, but he tends to emphasize self-reference as an objective structure of reality.[52] "There are self-referential systems in reality," Luhmann writes, "for instance molecules, cells, nerve-impulses, operations [. . .]. Thus, self-reference is not just a structure of knowledge. Rather, organic reality is made of [. . .] systems which refer to themselves with all their operations." And elsewhere: "self reference is a fact"[53] present "in the real world"[54] not a simple analytical category, *à la* Parsons.[55] Self-reference is the operation whereby the autopoietic system defines its own unity for itself, i.e., independently of the observers' viewpoint. This operation is the objective, pre-analytical condition which makes the system knowledgeable: "the autopoiesis of the object must be accepted, because objects evaporate without it; only all the other features may be selected and abstracted for analytical purposes."[56] Therefore autopoiesis must be considered a "condition of matter" (*Bedingung der Materie*).[57] One might even say, paraphrasing Spencer Brown, that "the physical world itself creates its own physics in order to be able to self-observe itself."[58]

All this conflicts with the epistemological background of the General Systems Theory, which always conceives its own categories as observer-dependent and purely analytical.[59] It also contradicts the spirit of Luhmann's previous works, coherently inspired by the ideas of contingency, complexity, causal interdetermination and "improbability" of

52. Danilo Zolo, "Reflexive Selbstbegründung der Soziologie und Autopoiesis. Über die epistemologischen Voraussetzungen der 'allgemeinen Theorie sozialer Systeme' Niklas Luhmanns," *Soziale Welt*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1985).

53. Niklas Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, II (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 29-30.

54. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 559-600.

56. Niklas Luhmann, "Autopoieisis, Handlung und kommunikative Verständigung," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1982).

57. Niklas Luhmann, *Politische Theorie im Wohlfahrtsstaat* (Munich-Vienna: Olzog, 1981), p. 148.

58. Luhmann, "The Theory of Social Systems and Its Epistemology. Reply to Danilo Zolo's Critical Comments," *op. cit.*

59. Cf. Giovanni F. Lanzara and Francesco Pardi, *L'interpretazione della complessitá* (Naples: Guida, 1980), pp. 15-26.

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the world. What is really disconcerting is that, in Luhmann's elaboration, autopoiesis lends itself to epitemological outcomes contrary to those envisaged by Maturana and Varela.

In the last chapter of *Soziale Systeme*, which is devoted to the *Konsequenzen für Erkenntnistheorie* of self-reference, Luhmann even maintains that "reality has a circular structure independently of knowledge."[60] This typically "realistic" proposition contradicts the basic thesis of the circularity and "closure" of the cognitive processes. Attributing to "reality" a circular structure not dependent on (the circularity of) knowledge amounts to implicitly violating the premise of the circular and "closed" nature of the cognitive processes. It amounts to claiming that at least one propriety, i.e., circularity, may be posited as an objective, absolute and invariant property of the "real world."

Difficulties of an equally serious nature obtain in Luhmann's theory of the self-referential observation. He attributes the ability to observe and self-observe to living and non-living systems. As already indicated, it is difficult to understand what Maturana and Varela mean by observation, conceived as "indication" and distinction, attributed to cells, bacteria, plants and *homo sapiens* with unchanging features. And it was even more difficult to accept the idea that living beings are capable of "self-observation" *qua* biological organisms. Luhmann not only fails to raise objections against this *epistemologia imaginabilis*, which does not attribute any specific historical and social meaning to the cognitive processes of *homo sapiens*, but also extends it to non-living systems. Thus Luhmann ends up attributing to key-terms such as "observation" and "self-observation," such allusive meanings as to prevent any significant connection of his theses to contemporary epistemology and philosophy of science.

Luhmann's concept of a naturalistic epistemology is also problematic.[61] This epistemology assumes self-reference as the structure of every "basic element" of knowledge. Within this theory, there is no separation between scientific research and its objects[62] and the traditional subject-object scheme breaks down.[63] In fact, "direct outside observation" of self-referential systems would be impossible.[64] Nevertheless, Luhmann refuses the implication that "*real ist, was die Erkenntnis als real bezeichnet*" because in this case we would be obliged to accept "*pure*

60. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, *op. cit.*, p. 648.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 25-6, 647-8, 658.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 653.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 658.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 654.

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Selbstreferenz," and this would be unsatisfactory.[65] It would then be necessary to found knowledge beyond self-reference. This foundation would in the end lead to a "reference to reality" thanks to an infinite regress from foundation to foundation.[66] Here we are faced with the insoluble antinomy of a "closed" but at the same time "open" circularity. In other words, it is the contradiction of a metaphysics of knowledge which tries to be simultaneously self- referential and realistic.

Anything Goes? The Need for Conceptual Clarification.

Luhmann's theory suffers the consequences of his radical epistemological relativism. While epistemological relativism may be intelligently proclaimed as a challenge to the old positivistic standards of scientific rigor, it cannot be operationalized without accepting the risk that it might work as an uncontrollable positive feedback mechanism. Also in epistemology one must draw a boundary between the inside and the outside and apply some criterion of discrimination and self-regulation within the inside. In the last chapter of *Soziale Systeme*, it is difficult not to get the impression that Luhmann is prepared to follow any epistemological proposal which transgresses "directional" cognitive procedures, and takes advantage of and diffuses the intellectual discomfort which the self-referential paradoxes introduce within formal logic and empirical research. This explains the abundance of references to authors such as Quine, Spencer Brown, von Foerster, Günther, Varela[67] who have tried to overcome the directional and asymmetrical categories of scientific communication. These same authors attempted to include the paradoxes of circularity and self-reference within scientific communication.

Luhmann also seems to have worked at avoiding the semantic stipulations of theoretical language. In fact, it appears that he wants to force the same logical and expressive possibilities of the human language. He even tries to free himself from the constraints of argumentative coherence. He goes as far as deliberately structuring his last theoretical work, *Soziale Systeme*, as a "labyrinth"[68] in which chapters, themes and concepts are not displayed in linear sequences, but in polycentric circles, whirls and spirals which the author invites his readers to pass through freely in any direction.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 648.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 648-9.
67. Varela, "A Calculus for Self-Reference," *op. cit.*, pp. 19-23.
68. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

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Naturally one cannot expect either easy comprehension or particular conceptual clarity, or any theoretical "order" from this type of research. One may argue that Luhmann is fully aware of all this. One might also argue that we are all aware that, at least in physics, order can emerge spontaneously from disorder and that disorder may in fact prove to be more fruitful of order than order itself. But even if one may rely on the Serendip effect, in epistemology it is necessary that at least the patterns of a rational design and the regularities of a new theoretical strategy emerge embryonically out of disorder. Obviously this is acceptable if one wants the theory sooner or later to absolve the function of "clarifying and rationally posing problems" as Luhmann himself set forth in the first volume of his *Soziologische Aufklärung*.[69] In other words, this is conditional to thinking that theoretical research must produce *usable knowledge*, and not be aimed at self-referentially reproducing itself by means of itself.

The doctrine of autopoiesis is wrong in accumulating and overlapping (at least) these four different problematic areas without even trying to justify this summary theoretical crisis.[70] Autopoietic theory is above all wrong in not separating the circular self-reference of logical paradox from every other purely reflexive form of self-reference. Only self-reference which produces logical antinomies, as in the case of the liar's paradox, may be considered "closed." On the other hand, it does not seem reasonable to consider "closed" what is in fact only partially recursive and therefore remains conditioned by initial premises which cannot be encircled and circularly neutralized. Only the "closed" circularity of logical self-reference poses serious problems. It is not clear furthermore, why one should think that the partial reflexivity of homeostatic mechanisms should be meant as "facts" producing insoluble difficulties within classical logic or even call for a radical epistemological revision.[71]

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69. Niklas Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung*, I (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1970), p. 35.

70. At least four theoretical areas should be distinguished: 1) logical circularity, studied by Russell, Gödel, Tarski and Quine, in the form of paradoxes (= antinomies) of self-reference and theorems of incompleteness of axiomatized systems; 2) linguistic (and epistemological) reflexivity, *qua* capacity of parts of (scientific) language of speaking about parts of (scientific) language; this reflexivity is only partial, not "circular." (I can only speak about words by using words, and using words different to those about which I am speaking); 3) the mechanisms of self-regulation, studied in biology and applied in cybernetics, particularly in the forms of homeostasis, feedback, self-catalysis, which stabilize biological or mechanical processes on the basis of certain premises; 4) psychological self-reference, as an "interior experience" in the adult *homo sapiens*. It seems impossible to achieve any intellectual or emotional transparent circularity in this experience.

71. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, *op. cit.*, p. 58; Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

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The general conclusion is that the mechanisms of functional reflexivity can be considered "closed" networks, i.e., as relational structures without contact with an environment, only on the basis of their arbitrary identification with the antinomies of formal logic. It is therefore not clear why concepts belonging to the General Systems Theory such as "openness" and "reflexivity" should be abandoned.

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Notes:

The Society of the Spectacle *20 Years Later: A Discussion**

Russell Berman, David Pan and Paul Piccone

Berman: Before beginning this discussion of Guy Debord's *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*, it is important to rethink the original spectacle thesis which could be described as a convergent reading of Lukács' neo-Hegelianism and Horkheimer/Adorno's account of the culture industry. It was about the proliferation of the commodity form in mid-century capitalism and how it transformed society by systematically substituting exchange-value and appearance for use-value and material concreteness. The question that needs to be asked, first of all, is: how successful was the spectacle thesis (like the culture industry thesis) in explaining a form of capitalism that was already obsolete by the mid-1960s? To the extent that, along with Lukács' neo-Hegelianism and Adorno's anti-phenomenology, the spectacle thesis also occluded the concreteness of lived experience, was it not already flawed at the point of its greatest plausibility? If we do not grant the spectacle thesis even a limited historically-specific legitimacy, but criticize it as inadequate from the very beginning, then it itself can be seen as part of the same spectacle it claimed to be attacking. For what it did was to advertise the allegedly absolute eradication of everyday life. That is why the Debordian position can be characterized as radical eradicationism: nothing remains beneath appearance.

What is the project of Debord's *Comments*? At face value, it has to be read as an attempt to update the spectacle. Thus it is not unlike attempts to rethink the "culture industry" thesis in order to update Adorno's description, and thereby to inquire into more modern or perhaps post-modern forms of domination. (At some point it may be useful to examine more closely differences between the spectacle and the culture industry as alternative critical-theoretical paradigms). As an "up-date," Debord's *Comments* manages to score some

* This discussion of Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcom Imrie (New York: Verso, 1990), was held in the *Telos* offices in New York City, Feb. 7, 1991.

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insightful points. For example, early on (p. 3) he suggests the complicity of much post-modern thought in contemporary forms of domination, in particular, academic post-modernism, which presents itself as subversive but in fact feeds into the predominant conformist ideology. Or, on pages 10-11, when he discusses major tendencies in contemporary society — technological renewal, integration of state and economy, generalized secrecy, unanswerable lies, and the eternal present — this is not off the mark. There is also a good account of what is bad about post-modern, post-historical, and post-political society. The problem is that all of this has been said much better elsewhere, and Debord just messes it up. One has to wonder why Verso went ahead to publish this text, except as an attempt to cash in on the spectacle of the name "Debord" given to a book pretending to relate back to a more substantive original.

As for the criticism, I would argue that the *Comments* impoverishes the original spectacle thesis in several crucial ways. It does not correct the inadequacies of the original account; in fact, it only makes matters worse. Debord was both right and wrong in the original text; now he is less right and more wrong. First: it is tragic to watch him reduce the spectacle thesis, which was once a plausible and global account of the spread of the commodity form, into merely a one-dimensional attack on the mass media as a vehicle of deliberate misinformation. In some passages, the *Comments* seems just to be attacking journalists and the television and radio networks. Clearly, this comes across as an abridged account when measured againt the original spectacle thesis. Secondly: Debord turns his thesis into a generalized conspiracy theory. At times he speaks of the "bosses of the spectacle" or "those who control the spectacle." This is the rhetoric of a bad vulgar Marxism and Left mythology, as if there is an executive committee of the spectacle controlling everything and duping everybody, who are always nice but dumb. Indeed, at one point in the text, he discusses this argument directly and claims that, whereas the conspiracy-theoretical form may have been inappropriate once upon a time, in the days of classical Marxism, such is no longer the case. Now, because of the character of the late spectacle, conspiracy theory is precisely what Debord wants to articulate (cf. pp. 20, 26, 28).

Why does he do this? Why this paranoid streak? To some extent he may be responding to the specifically West European experience of covert police intelligence gathering systems, such as the *Überwachungsstaat* or *Sicherheitsstaat* in West Germany or the recent scandal in Switzerland, where the federal police collected dossiers on many citizens. Yet, unlike Debord, who views this West European "integrated spectacle" as a historical advance over the "diffuse spectacle" in the US, I would argue that this kind of intelligence activity in Western Europe is itself an anachronism when measured against the US, where domestic intelligence services have been gradually dismantled since Watergate. In other words, the modern or post-modern industrial state can thrive very well without these cops and robbers travesties. Yet neither Debord nor the Interpol seem to have figured this out. The other explanation of this

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sad reduction of the spectacle to conspiracy is that Debord is perhaps fixated on secret societies due to the unsolved murder of his friend, Gérard Lebovici, to whom he has dedicated the book. But if this personal tragedy accounts for the theoretical inadequacies, it is all the more unfortunate that Verso went ahead and published such an embarassing document.

Finally, he seems to be saying that secret societies and conspiracies are a corollary to the disappearance of intelligence in society as a whole (much like Jacoby's law of a "falling rate of intelligence"). The problem with this logic is that Debord wants to speak from the standpoint of the last avant-garde. He, and perhaps a few others, are the last intellectuals in the know. Then there are the bad guys in charge of the spectacle, who are also in the know but get the values wrong; and, last and least, there are the duped masses deprived of all intelligence. Debord attacks the "concentrated spectacle" of Stalinism, while he himself retains an obviously Leninist stance of vanguardism — probably part of his surrealist legacy — oriented to the small cadre group that knows it all better. That is why he has only contempt for any mode of social interaction outside the intellectual leadership. He cannot imagine society operating without the leadership of an intellectual vanguard: it is either going to be the bad secret societies who are in control or the good situationists. People left to their own just cannot get it together. This explains the interesting *lapsus* in his comments on McLuhan. He is right in criticizing McLuhan's "global village" as an alibi for conformism, but for the wrong reasons. In fact, Debord goes on to claim that the global village is necessarily conformist because, for him, villages are always conformist, and towns are always the place of innovations. Debord's anti-village, anti-populist rhetoric is New Class ideology. This comes out again in his discussion of the Mafia. Of course, one does not defend the Mafia simply because Debord attacks it. But on what grounds does he attack it? What bothers Debord is not the Mafia's violence or its complicity with the state, but its allegedly informal social bonds. Debord disqualifies these informal bonds because they are not up to his standards of intellectuality (p. 69). For Debord, there is no realm of everyday experience, there are no accidents or communities. He assumes that capitalism has not just *obscured* concrete experience by excluding it from systems of representation, but fully eradicated it. It is no longer just a matter of not knowing about everyday life; it is simply no longer there. This is why it is necessary to have intellectuals, the situationists — the good secret societies — to spell out what kind of experience one should have. This is why the only motion — he does remain a kind of dialectical thinker in the Lukácsian tradition — allowed into the story takes place within the spectacle: his ridiculous science-fiction model of conspiracies spying on each other as the motor of history (p. 83). There is only progress within the spectacle, and no progress against the spectacle. The alternative dialectic would be one between the spectacle and everyday life, but that is impossible for eradicationists like Debord. Such an alternative may be labelled a reconstructed populism or neo-populism.

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Piccone: So much for the elitism of a handful of situationists who have yet to find their way out of the thick conceptual fog called "the spectacle" that seems to have settled in Brussels around the mid-1960s. But Debord's work, at least the original effort, should not be read as theory *sic et nunc*, but as a brilliant reformulation of Marxist theory at the level of *dialectical poetry*. This means that, when evaluated as *theory*, it falls far short. Before elaborating some of the points already raised, as well as others, it may be useful to add to Berman's devastating critique a few minor historical qualifications concerning the original thesis and its theoretical pedigree, in order to provide some historical documentation for the charges he has made. This may help clarify what at first presents itself as a paradox: the eradicationism that Berman diagnoses in the situationists in general and Debord in particular as the advanced symptoms of an intellectual disease is precisely what in the late 1960s was regarded as the medicine within the spectacle thesis. In fact, the situationists' original mystique, i.e., the aura of concreteness which seemed to set them apart from their more wooden and doctrinaire Communist or Trotskyist cousins, was predicated precisely on the misperception of their position as a meaningful alternative to standard Stalinist falsifications. This was a result of their association with what in Berman's presentation remains as the theoretical missing link between Lukács and Debord, who cannot really be understood as Lukács plus the culture industry (since that would suggest that Debord is, in some sense, post-Adornian). I am talking about surrealism, council communism and *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. As such, Debord's "spectacle" is not a continuation or refinement of the theory of the culture industry, but a brand X version of it, exhibiting all its shortcomings and more, but lacking most of its insights.

This is not the place to indulge in another trashing of the infantile idiocies of surrealism, nor in a reexamination of the terminal productivist shortcomings of council communist visions. Something, however, should be said about the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* heritage, the source of the situationists' political philosophy, since it seems to be enjoying an American revival with the recent English translation of the main texts of its leading exponents. That after almost 40 years of wading through the swamps of council communism and Trotskyism, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*'s main theoreticians, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, have respectively ended up rediscovering the virtues of representative democracy (*Essais sur la politique*) or Cold War anti-communism precisely at a time when even the far Right is giving it up (*Devant la Guerre*), should not detract from the fact that from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, when they finally threw in the towel, the group was misperceived by a good number of French fellow-travellers as a viable Left alternative to Stalinism and Trotskyism. Unfortunately, their critique of the bureaucracy and their alleged vindication of proletarian particularity turns out, after a careful re-reading of the key texts, to continue uncritically in the Lukácsian tradition of substituting for real people the category "proletariat," which unfolds necessarily according to the logic of the commodity traced out in the first volume of Marx' *Capital*. Thus, already

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in Castoriadis' 1948 essay on "Phénoménologie de la conscience prolétarienne," the bureaucracy is substituted for capital in a crude recycling of the key essay in *History and Class Consciousness* on "Reification." That Lukács' subject-object identity is not seen as a monolithic class, but is posed as "infinitely differentiated within itself" and finally confronted with the revolutionary choice of whether to be "everything or nothing," does not make it any more concrete. The voluntarist and pluralist caveats turn out to be rhetorical flourishes and, as in Marx's and Lukács' original version, the abstract metaphysical construct "the proletariat" drives inexorably towards the big bang pompously Hegelianized as "the passage of the in itself to the for itself."

Sooner or later, however, idealist flights end up crashing on the hard rocks of real life. Thus, in Lukács' case, after the big bang in Germany fizzled out and the USSR beat a hasty retreat into NEP and "barbarism in one country," the only option he could entertain was *Partynost* and the crudest kind of Stalinism. A quarter of a century later, in Castoriadis' case, the long march through the Cold War ended up in embarrassing untimely misreadings of political realities resulting in the dissolution of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* immediately before the 1968 events — the closest he would ever come to any revolutionary big bang — and buying into the most paranoid anti-communism (predicated on the assumed unreformability of an inherently stable Soviet-type system) shortly before *perestroika* and *glasnost* revealed the bankruptcy of communist systems. A couple of decades later, with Debord, Marx's and Lukács' original logic of capital, which with Castoriadis had become the logic of bureaucracy, became the logic of the spectacle. Yet, no matter how many new theoretical bottles it was decanted through, this old Marxist wine remained the same undrinkable vinegar. Abstract categories continue displacing concrete reality, this time not as a philosophical *lapsus* but as an explicitly spelled out position. Debord's spectacle is no longer "a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (thesis # 4 of the original *Society of the Spectacle*). It has become life itself which, in 1967, he still thought could be confronted only by the mythical workers' councils, as the link between the individual and universal history (thesis # 221). And even within this fictional account, it was not universal history, as a nomological construct, which had to be brought down to the level of real people, to help them mediate their present but, in a typically idealist manner, the category "people" had to be injected into a universal history which can only be another arbitrary narrative. By 1988, when it became obvious that this sublation of the individual to the ethereal realm of universal history had not taken place, presumably because of the development of what he calls "the integrated spectacle" (a miserable euphemism for otherwise run-of-the-mill social democracy), Debord's account degenerated to a never-never land of conspiracies among spy agencies, all the while still waiting for a "changeover" which, somehow, is still seen as imminent (p. 88).

This is much cruder than even the most simplistic reading of the culture

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industry thesis. It is Adorno gone mad in a situation in which there is no longer any access to concrete experience, capitalism reigns supreme, and only a few marginal intellectuals can figure out what is going on. But without at least a minimum of concrete experience, there can be no life and no reproduction. Thus, in capitalism, or in any conspiracy, some concrete experience must remain. Otherwise, conspiracy itself becomes meaningless and exploitation and domination themselves become impossible. As in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the vanquished enemy cannot be killed, but must remain as a slave in order to legitimate the winner as the master. This is the whole point of artificial negativity. The spectacle, as a not altogether felicitous metaphor for a society whose ideological representations have become the main instrument of social domination, does obtain as a tendency, but it can never reach the level of intensity and pervasiveness that Debord thinks it does. By ruling out the very possibility of any lived experience whereby reality can be confronted prior to its mental transformation into exemplars of those representations which we subsequently end up perceiving, Debord makes all history spectacular, which leads him to postulate conspiracies as the new *deus ex machina* in contemporary history.

In this respect, *Comments* is a book inextricably rooted in the particular Western European experiences of the 1970s. Even in Western Europe, however, it was already obsolete by the early 1980s. It is obsessed with the repressive state apparatus and the repressive measures that were employed by some European states to fight the Red Guards, the Red Brigades and other terrorist groups. That type of historically specific analysis, if at all valid as an interpretation of that particular period at that particular time, cannot be generalized to shed any light on present events anywhere in the world today. If we ask, "What was the meaning of the terrorism of the 1970s?" by no stretch of even the wildest Marxist imagination can it be seen in terms of failed efforts of a class vanguard or of well-meaning but misguided "comrades," as the European Left proposed. Nor was it merely another expression of political criminality, as the Right claimed. A more plausible answer is that it was a desperate last gasp attempt to reverse a misperceived hopeless situation by those 1968ers who uncritically bought the eradicationist assumptions implicit in most Left theory — including the spectacle thesis — and became terrorists. They could see no way out of their predicament other than by shock therapy, by means of "exemplary" acts meant to reveal the fragility of a state falsely posing as all-powerful and unassailable. Allegedly, having thereby been made aware of the state's inherent instability, "the masses" would begin to exercise their power and undertake the kind of revolutionary project that had been stymied by the spectacle. In this sense, the terrorism of the 1970s was not qualitatively different from previous versions at the turn of the century. As it turned out, however, the state was much less fragile than the terrorists thought. The "masses" were apparently more concerned with defending their existing communities and life-styles than in subscribing to that massive project

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of social re-engineering marketed under the label of "revolution" which, as the experience of "really existing socialism" has revealed, was nothing other than a more extreme version of the very same manipulation of which they were already the victims.

Debord, the situationists and, yes, the terrorists of the 1970s, to the extent that they took the pathological predicament of alienation to be normal, could not envision bursts of sanity constantly flaring within communities — and therefore constantly providing the possibility for the demystification of the spectacle. Thus they ended up theorizing the *prise de conscience* as the triggering of revolution *qua* big bang: something that can be brought about by means of the voluntaristic revolutionary act. Conspiracies are thus needed to keep the system together as a seemless web as well as to change it, since "one cannot reform the most trifling detail without taking the whole apart."

But let us return to the question of concrete experience. This is essential: as Berman has pointed out, to the extent that they assume the eradication of all concrete experience, Debord and the situationists are New Class ideologists *par excellence*. They deny any type of meaningful experience to anyone outside of a bunch of "exceptional" intellectuals bitching and moaning about the spectacle in the cafés of Paris and Brussels. As already indicated, this is a result of their adherence to an extremely eradicationist version of the theory of alienation whereby cretinization can be accomplished once and for all. But alienation is a fundamentally unstable condition which must be constantly created and recreated. Only to the extent that the system is able to constantly reproduce and recreate social mechanisms conducive to alienation is it possible to keep it functioning as it does. The point therefore is that a situation of spectacularity is not a normal state of affairs: it is a pathological predicament constantly threatening to break down, and therefore in need of constant reconstitution.

Pan: I think we need to differentiate the way in which Debord treats concrete experience in *The Society of the Spectacle* and in the *Comments*. In *The Society of the Spectacle* concrete experience is the desideratum which drives the entire analysis. The orientation toward this goal is lost in the *Comments*, however, because of the utopian position it holds within Debord's thought. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, he writes: "In the demand to *live* the historical time which it makes, the proletariat finds the simple unforgettable center of its revolutionary project; and every attempt (thwarted until now) to realize this project marks a point of possible departure for new historical life." (thesis #143) This goal of lived historical time toward which Debord structures his analysis enables him to criticize the New Class in the Soviet Union and to concentrate on locally organized structures as the site of "*active* communication" (thesis #116). As Piccone has pointed out, however, Debord sees the proletariat as the sole possible locus of lived historical time, while never bothering to theorize what the proletariat could mean as something other than an abstract concept. Consequently, in spite of his attempt to decentralize political structures by means of

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the workers' councils, he does concrete historical experience a disservice by automatically assigning it a place in the revolutionary project without attempting to investigate such concrete experience as something of value independent of a universal history.

Debord's failure to allow for the existence of lived experience is tied to his progressivism, which sees each stage in human development as a negation of the previous stage and thus conceives of revolution as a way of breaking with the past and with the concrete historical experience he wishes to save. This contradiction arises out of his refusal to appreciate the value of tradition in maintaining the basis upon which active communication and historical life can have a language and a medium in which to develop. The second reason for Debord's contradictory praise for a concrete experience which he proceeds to disavow is his rejection of the possibility that anything could interrupt and alter the development of the spectacular system. The only possibility he recognizes for change arises out of the inner development of the spectacle and not out of any intervention on the part of experience. Though he organizes his argument toward the utopia of lived historical experience, his utopianism undermines its own contents, forcing experience into a developmental logic whose formality leaves no space for intervention. Without an understanding of lived experience which includes a sense, not just of its possibility in some indistinct future, but of its present existence, Debord's conception of lived experience as a teleological construct and not an epistemological moment turns into a confirmation of the necessity of the alienation in the spectacle.

The other point about *The Society of the Spectacle* is that we still cannot throw away the thesis that the spectacle does in fact obscure lived experience. What we might want to look into is the extent to which the spectacle either obscures lived experience in such a way that it is able to integrate experience and then provide a surrogate for it or, on the other hand, by obscuring experience also leave lived experience the possibility to develop without outside interference. The extent to which the spectacle ignores and fails to recognize the possibilities of lived experience also outlines the extent to which the spectacle leaves lived experience a space in which to develop.

Though in the *Comments* Debord attempts to describe the Mafia and the proliferation of conspiracy as extensions of the logic of the spectacle, these phenomena actually run counter to this logic to the extent that they present a return of familial and group bonds which take priority over relations mediated by commodities. In spite of his attempt to argue that the Mafia, business, and the state all work together in a large conspiracy and unified system of surveillance, his own description includes passages (pp. 82-4) which describe the irrationality and inner conflicts between and within these different groups which make such a unified system of surveillance impossible. Opposed to the spectacle as a kind of counter-development is a production of possibilities for lived experience which are opposed to the spectacle. Debord fails to recognize these possibilities because his arguments about the decline of logic resulting

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from the simultaneity of images in the spectacle are predicated on a technological determinism which traps him in the logic of the spectacle.

Piccone: Maybe we we should elaborate the relation between the spectacle and lived experience. As Hegel describes it in the opening pages of *The Phenomenology of Mind*, lived experience begins as sense certainty, which is always fleeting, immediate and meaningless. The process is very complex, but what ultimately constitutes this sense certainty into meaning are the mediations deployed to apprehend it *conceptually* and thus *perceive* it in terms of a teleological praxis already prestructured by the individual's values and interests. The Adornian theory of the culture industry generates an analysis of advanced capitalist society superficially similar to Debord's account of *The Society of the Spectacle* by explaining how, in a situation in which individuality no longer obtains (because of the development of authoritarian personalities), the mediations used in translating sense certainty to the level of perceptions which subsequently determine political behavior are no longer organically related to the values and interests of subindividuals stuck with authoritarian personalities. Such subindividuals find themselves in a pathological socio-psychological situation in that, unable to establish which conceptual mediations will allow them to perceive social reality according to their interests and values, have to rely on the pre-packaged mediations provided by the culture industry. But such externally provided mediations do not embody the individual's own interests and values but, rather, those of the culture industry. In this sense, the resulting consciousness is *false consciousness* — a consciousness addicted to consumerism, since satisfaction is now arbitrarily associated by the culture industry's mediations with particular commodities. As William Leiss showed a few years ago in *The Limits of Satisfaction* (but which was actually already prefigured in *The Society of the Spectacle*), to the extent that real needs are only *partially* satisfied by whatever commodities are arbitrarily associated with them, consumption only paves the way for *more* consumption in the futile search for a fulfillment which can never be achieved in this fashion.

So far, Adorno and Debord seem to be running along parallel tracks. In fact, the astonishing feature of *The Society of the Spectacle* is the succinctness and elegance with which Debord is able to summarize, even if only in a sketchy and superficial way, so much neo-Hegelian thought in 221 terse theses. Adorno and Debord part ways, however, in their respective attempt at solutions. Debord does not subscribe to Adorno's social psychology, but appeals instead to Joseph Gabel's theories to explain false consciousness — an account that rotates around the Lukácsian dialectic of whole and part, presupposing the post-revolutionary rationalization of the whole as a condition for restoring the sanity of the parts. This is a traditional Marxist puzzle, whose only solution is either faith in the inevitabilty of the revolution (the Second International) or voluntaristic elitism the Third International). When all is said and done — and in spite of his various criticisms of that position — Debord ends up in the latter

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camp. Clearly out of gas by thesis # 220, he abruptly closed *The Society of the Spectacle* with a sudden appeal to the workers' councils as the agency of redemption — an appeal totally unwarranted by the earlier presentation. What is most problematic, however, is not this sudden dogmatic closure, but the two lines of justification he provides: the councils are the chosen agency of redemption because they mediate between the individual and universal history, and are able to insert the former in the latter. The kind of covert Leninism Berman has pointed out transpires in this forced insertion. To the extent that the universal history Debord refers to can only be the domain of intellectuals, they alone have access to truth as "the true critique of the society of the spectacle" alluded to in thesis # 220. In this sense, the eradicationism of *Comments* is already present, *in nuce*, in the original.

As for Adorno's theory of the culture industry, while resulting in an overprivileging of art and philosophy as still providing access to truth, its social psychology leaves open the possibility of other modes of individuation, under conditions different from those found in *laissez faire* capitalism (which are the context within which the authoritarian personality tends to develop). Thus, within the new context of post-Fordism, the social conditions conducive to the constitution of the authoritarian personality described in detail in the 1936 study on *Autorität und Familie* no longer seem to obtain. While this is no guarantee that healthy individuation will result, the point remains that Adorno's culture industry does not entail the kind of endgame of *The Society of the Spectacle*. Thus, rather than being part of Debord's framework, I would argue that the theory of the culture industry is a much richer alternative to it.

This may also help explain why they follow different paths. Having written *The Society of the Spectacle,* Debord stops writing, clearly because, as he puts it in the opening pages of *Comments*, he does not want his ideas to contribute in any way to the strengthening of that spectacle he is attacking. The conspiratorial outlook is a logical consequence of his extreme eradicationism. Knowledge is purely instrumental and can be used by all in any way they wish. The emphasis is on the object, constituted once and for all, rather than on the process of apprehension whereby the knowing subjects constitute themselves as well as the object. Adorno chose a rather different strategy, also continuous with his other positions. He kept writing, but in a practically impenetrable style impervious to any passive "spectacular" reception: the very process of decoding it presupposes the overcoming of that very alienation fostered by the spectacle. To the extent that the serious reader cannot automatically apply the standard conceptual mediations provided by the culture industry to grasp the various levels of meaning, it becomes necessary to constantly reexamine the interpretative process, thus at the same time reestablishing that organic relation between perception and values whose severance is the trademark of false consciousness.

Berman: I agree with some of the things Piccone said, especially the suggestion that *Comments* is a book of the 1970s, responding to some of the police-state

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strategies to confront terrorism through *Berufsverbot* and so forth. As I have already said, that was a specific situation which was already obsolete measured against the more advanced model of post-Watergate US, where it turns out that the state can remain very secure without that sort of covert police activity. It is only a Europessimist paranoia that forced the Germans, the Italians and the French to deploy repressive measures bordering on authoritarianism. In fact, the level of political violence was not significantly higher in Western Europe than in the US. The big difference is rather the *perception* of terrorism in West European states, immediately regarded as a major threat to state security, while the much greater amount of violence here is precisely what permits the state to exist. This line of argument, however, we may not want to pursue, since it would lead us in directions other than the ones we want to follow. At any rate, this is definitely a dated book — was it only published late or did Debord stop thinking ten years ago?

I want to disagree, however, with Piccone's "Adorno-gone-mad" thesis; the issue in Debord is much more an extreme extrapolation from Lukács. It does not make sense to use Debord to attack Adorno. There are certainly elements in Adorno that are convergent with Debord, but there are many other elements in Adorno that save his theorizing from the Debordian conclusions. They definitely do not write in a similar style. Debord writes a parody of Marxist theses: military listings of apodictic statements, presented as assertions which one cannot question. Any sentence of Adorno is already self-questioning and emphatically self-contradictory. That perpetual retraction of one's own assertions is what makes Adorno's prose very different from Debord's. That is why Debord's dialectic is crude, merely a dialectic within the form, while Adorno's dialectic pervades the content altogether.

Let me move on to nuance Piccone's comments. Debord in the *Comments* and for that matter in the *Spectacle*, ends up bordering on several other material domains: terrorism, culture industry and intellectuals. Piccone has pointed out some similarities. I want to draw attention to some key differences in order to suggest that the Debord of the *Comments* is in fact not even up to the level of the political criticism in something as crude as terrorism. For in post-1968 terrorism one certainly had an elitist vanguardism operating — on that score Debord is one with them — but historically terrorism shaded through the *narodniks* into an anarchism that imagined that the spectacle could be blown up to release something outside the false appearance. There is nothing outside the false appearance for Debord of the *Comments*. That is a major difference: terrorism without people.

With regard to the culture industry thesis: again the sense of a proliferation of false appearance is the point of conjunction with Debord. But the culture industry thesis always existed in a dialectical relation to material allegedly outside of the culture industry: genuine art or genuine popular, perhaps populist, culture. None of this appears in Debord. In the *Comments*, one is always only within the conspiracy of the spectacle. There is nothing else but that science

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fiction world where there is no art, no people, and no concrete experience. Finally, yes, Debord is — perhaps even more than the radicalized Lukács — the quintessence of the ideologue of New Class intellectuals. This does not mean that he should be equated with intellectuals *tout court* but, rather, with a particular elitist segment. The task, therefore, would be to try to imagine a non-New-Class, non-Debordian account of intellectuals — a positive account of intellectuals, that would be a very different one than the vanguardist position that he calls for. It would probably have to do with issues such as mediation, innovation, but also historical memory. There is no historical memory in the conspirators who populate Debord's world, who operate solely within a logic of instrumental reason — information and disinformation — with a clear goal of deception. So, with regard to terrorism, culture industry, and intellectuals: yes, Debord has something in common with all of them, but he gets the worst part of all and throws out what is interesting.

The final point I want to make has to do with concrete experience. I have already described Debord as an eradicationist, meaning that in his account concrete experience is fully annihilated. But if I attack Debord's eradicationism, that does not mean one should be satisfied with an ahistorical existentialist account of concrete experience as something perpetually replenishable and never touched by the logic of the spectacle. One can talk about the history of concrete experience, and maybe the shift from the era of the first spectacle thesis and the era of the *Comments* has to do with a greater obfuscation of the concrete: not that it destroys the concrete — that is Debord's eradicationist error — but that somehow the penetration of ideology into all levels of experience is much stronger than it may have been in the late 1960s. If that is the case, then, without participating in eradicationism, one can give an account of the major sort of cultural-theoretical paradigms that have come to prevail since the 1970s, variously semiotic accounts, which imagine culture to be an amalgamation of codes without reference to an outside. That lack of referentiality to an outside is eradicationism. The refusal of an outside to the codes of the spectacle comes in various modes and registers. In Debord's version, it is a kind of paranoia, a fear of conspiracies, although coupled with a concession that one can never get away from conspiracies. In the case of Jean-François Lyotard, you have rather a manic celebration of the proliferation of codes, again with no outside. In the case of Michel Foucault, one finds a depressive discourse-theoretical model of codes which are imagined to be constrictive and confining, although there is nothing of substance that is constricted and confined, since the subject itself is just a function of the code. In the case of consistent deconstruction, there is a schizophrenic version, where all the codes are always operating but never make sense with each other; the contradictions are differences *within* the realm of language, not *between* language and an external dimension. Debord has to be seen in this intellectual context.

Pan: The distinction between Adorno and Debord can also be pursued in the

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way in which each integrates the category of experience into their projects. While Debord's attempt in *The Society of the Spectacle* to bring thought closer to practice merely subjugates concrete experience to the abstract categories of thought by establishing a condition in which "theory can be recognized and lived by the masses" and workers "become dialecticians and inscribe their thought into practice (thesis # 123), Adorno's project by the time of *Aesthetic Theory* is to reorient thought towards experience as its constitutive moment. As Berman pointed out, the difference between Adorno and Debord is expressed in their differing use of the dialectic. While Debord's dialectic establishes a relation between two sequential moments of his argument, Adorno rejects this abstract dialectic in order to construct a relation between thought and concrete experience which thought can never replace nor directly transmit.

Piccone: Let us go back to this business of Debord as "Adorno-gone-mad." As I have already indicated, this does not mean that Debord pushes Adorno to his logical conclusions. Rather, the opposite is the case: in relation to Adorno, Debord is a regression. Berman's formulation of Debord as "Lukács-gone-mad" is probably closer to the mark. Having said that, however, we should not overlook that in Adorno there is also an eradicationist moment: the refusal to acknowledge the permanent presence of an ineradicable experiential dimension beneath all subsequent spectacular obfuscations. But Adorno is clever enough to recuperate it whenever he has to. The point, however, is that, in order to focus on the historicity of the constitution of meaning, he rejects all attempts to ontologize experience, which he condemns as reifications. Clearly, the target here is Heidegger and existentialism, whose ontologization of life and experience pave the way for the hypostatization of the historical to the level of the natural and, consequently, an apologetic stance *vis-à-vis* the *status quo*. In excluding life and experience from the domain of the concept, where they can only appear as reifications, Adorno falls victim to the philosopher's occupational hazard: all Being tends to be reduced to thought. This is why art, as a mode of apprehending Being free of the constraints necessarily imposed by the debilitating onesidedness of the concept, plays such a key role in Adorno's philosophy. It provides that access to truth otherwise blocked by the concept's complicity in legitimating the onesidedness of the *status quo*. This is miles ahead of Debord, who attempts to vindicate access to Being in traditional Marxist fashion, by appealing to that collective workers' council praxis where thought inevitably clashes with Being. Brilliant as the presentation may be, it does not avoid the Leninist pitfall of overprivileging the revolutionary intellectuals' theoretical expertise, *even when attempting to vindicate that concrete otherness* it ends up representing.

Adorno's eradicationism, however, becomes debilitating when reconstituting the dialectic as *negative dialectic*. To the extent that it is predicated on the impossibility of accessing a Being, all of whose possible conceptual articulations are already permeated by the falsity of the whole, negative dialectic forfeits

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any constitutive claims and retreats to that critical sniping which, within the administered society, Adorno regards as the only clarificatory function of philosophy. This is consistent with the evaluation of the present as ruling out any significant emancipatory reversals. It would take us far afield here to elaborate this point. All that needs to be said, however, is that Adorno's negative dialectic is the philosophical elaboration of a whole series of historically specific political judgments which may no longer be valid.

As for the question concerning memory, it may be helpful to relate it to the previous comments about the village, where there always seems to be memory in the form of customs, traditions and rituals. Debord dismisses all this on the ground that it does not meet his standards of intellectuality. The village is not the public sphere or the *agora*. But as lived experience, these customs, traditions and rituals transmit concrete identities. Furthermore, to the extent that these traditional forms have to be *reconstituted* every time they are practiced, they also tend to refocus memory in terms of whatever new conditions happen to obtain. In this sense, customs function exactly as theory should, in mediating everyday life. In the process of shifting from traditions to theory, from what could be obfuscated as a shift from the "in itself to the for itself," the spectacle tends to destroy the first without at the same time bringing about the second (which, at any rate, can never entirely do without the other). And it is in this stasis that the spectacle seems to generate a society of passive spectators. But this is clearly a passing phase which, as such, does not necessarily entail a regression. As recent developments in Eastern Europe as well as in the West indicate, although much of the resurfacing of traditional residues are suspect in that these residues may have been manufactured much later than claimed by those standing to benefit from their recycling, the spectacle, in either its concentrated, diffused and integrated form, has been a lot less successful in eradicating all memory than everyone assumed. Debord's eradicationism leads him into a kind of negative progressivism, which surprisingly enough I also detect in Berman's account, whereby, pending the coming of the big bang, everything goes progressively to hell.

It may very well be that the village remains buried in each and every one of us who may have managed to avoid the sort of cretinization fostered by the new modes of socialization and resulting "authoritarian personality" or its alienated equivalent. The point, however, is that it is not so much a matter of getting better or worse, but of reproducing life and community while preventing destructive forces from destroying them, often under the pretense of progress and improvements.

Berman: I feel I am being forced into a defense of an aspect of Debord. Be it spectacle or ideology or domination via codes of representation: the problem increases in rendering obsolete older technologies of domination, such as domestic intelligence gathering networks. Piccone suggests that this may be my crypto-progressivism or a suggestion of a negative universal history. Maybe it is or maybe it is just thirty years, but I wonder whether his reluctance to talk about

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better or worse, more or less efficiency, his suggestion that these are just different modes of managing domination, his refusal to construct it historically, is a consequence of an implicit insistence on the perpetually replenishable concreteness of human experience that somehow always thrives no matter what domination does to it. Clearly, against eradicationism, one wants to hold onto a concrete dimension. But there is a possible conservative resonance of that — conservative now in a bad sense — as if one were saying, no matter how bad it gets, tomorrow is always another day and people will always keep on living.

Piccone: Clearly, I was not trying to put forth a Panglossian view of Being as unchanging or as inherently "good." I wanted to get at the eschatological element, whereby the spectacle seems to be going somewhere that Debord does not like, whereas, instead, it should lead to redemption. . .

Berman: An anti-redemptionist position on your part?

Piccone: Not at all. Redemption is not something readily achievable like going to heaven. It is a *novum* in the Blochian sense or an horizon. It is something that allows us to structure life and consciousness without necessarily ever getting there. The important point is not the actual achievement of this *eschaton*, but that it structures life by providing meanings which allow us to distinguish between what is emancipatory and what is repressive, good and bad, right and wrong, etc. Even though the utopian dimension is an inextricable part of life, it does not follow that, unless the projected goal is achieved, one has failed. The importance of utopia is primarily constitutive. The same can be said of the spectacle. It translates eschatology into consumption which, like the former, also remains beyond reach. As mentioned earlier, satisfaction is only attained through the consumption of commodities which, however, only perpetuates an infinite process of further consumption. Christian eschatology thus secularizes into consumerism and, post-modernists would add, not with altogether unpleasant outcomes. This legitimates the spectacle as a kind of regulatory mechanism integrating production, consumption and consciousness. As in the earlier freezing of Christianity into the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, its function is to legitimate, stabilize and naturalize the predominant relations of domination.

Berman: So we are agreed that teleology is a constitutive moment of community: not in the sense that an objectivist teleology prevails in history but that looking forward to a horizon is one way to hold together society. But it is of course not teleology that gives meaning to life, but life that gives meaning to teleology. And only particular forms of social life can do so, i.e., life in a community. Now the negative progressivism of which you accused me a moment ago would lead me to worry if the social structures, named perhaps community, which permit the imagination of the *eschaton* and therefore the possibility of teleology, are themselves not challenged by the structures of

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capitalism or, as Debord would put it, the spectacle. That is, is the possibility of community, including the possibility of imagining teleology and sharing values, not itself a historical acheivement that might well be subverted by certain modes of experience? To answer no — as I expect you to do — would imply a fundamental ontological description of the human condition, impervious to real history, always able to arise from the ashes of destruction that social forms may have wreaked upon it. And I wonder if that sort of barely hidden Heideggerianism explains the attempt to associate Debord with Adorno.

Piccone: Wait a second: This is a no win-situation. On the one hand, there is this essentially static ontological eternal recurrence — a kind of Nietzschean cyclic view of history — and, on the other, this eschatological crypto-Christian account whereby everything is structured by the teleological dimension and experience is always fundamentally historical (in fact, history itself is defined by this teleological project). What ends up eliminated is the *constancy* of everyday life which obtains in relation to a teleological dimension stabilizing it. This is why religion, which usually provides this teleology, has been such a crucial element in generating social cohesion. But the form the communities take is never given once and for all, but is always conflictual, contradictory and otherwise in turmoil. Yet this does not mean we must plot its persistence through time on a progressive trajectory, whereby the latest stages are presumably better than earlier ones. They can also be seen, more realistically, as different configurations of a certain type of structuration which may not be really getting where we have historically assumed we were going, i.e., heaven or salvation, etc. Real redemption is not in the end, but in the process itself. The way the process retains its coherence is by positing as the *eschaton* something to be achieved, which thereby allows the whole process to be structured meaningfully.

Pan: But the issue is not so much the structure of the community as the structure of the spectacle which either threatens to colonize the community to such an extent that that type of regeneration would not be possible anymore or sets up relations so alienated from real experience that its images would lose the vitality necessary to make them credible.

Piccone: This is what I was trying to describe before. What makes the spectacle so effective and so pervasive is that in some way it provides a glimpse of this redemption through consumption, while at the same time ruling out any definitive satisfaction. As such, it constantly recreates the conditions for the reproduction of domination.

Pan: In that case, there would be no possibility for regeneration of community because the logic of capitalism would constantly use up those forces necessary to construct community structures.

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Piccone: Well, here we are talking about two parallel processes. Consumerism is part of the same logic that obtains at the community level. It is not that the one displaces the other, because in fact one cannot lead a life entirely as a consumer or by not consuming at all (and, in this particular society, consuming means consuming *commodities*). What happens is that capitalism and consumerism are able to provide enough satisfaction as to fulfill minimal community needs, while at the same time guaranteeing the reproduction of the structure of domination. This is one of the points raised in our earlier discussions concerning Christopher Lasch's book, *The True and Only Heaven*. Notwithstanding all capitalist penetration and reproduction of the structure of domination, all sorts of strange communities seem to be able to thrive in spite of the constant threats posed by the commodity form and its legal otherness, the state understood not as a *Rechtsstaat*, but as a spectacular parliamentary fiction created by legal positivism.

Pan: Commodities and the spectacle do not always necessarily displace community structures. But because community development and capitalist penetration are often in conflict concerning the direction of social relations in any given situation, community structures can be weakened by state and capitalist intervention, which usurp decision-making power from local communities. Consequently, the success of communities depends on their ability to maintain inner cohesion, autonomy from centralized structures, and an orientation of the individual's economy of desires around local objects. At any rate, this success depends on whether the spectacle can altogether displace community structures.

Piccone: Not only it cannot, but for its own good it should not. If it did, it would self-destruct. In fact, by the mid-1960s the system seemed to be pretty close to that point. This is not the place to reiterate the artificial negativity analysis of these events in terms of how the tendential elimination and homogenization of all particularity, specificity and otherness became counterproductive and triggered a reversal in the logic of the system. Unlike Debord's account of a unilinear development and intensification of the logic of the commodity form from the days of *The Society of the Spectacle* to those of *Comments* — which may account for the latter's surprising staleness — the artificial negativity analysis tries to explain the proliferation of artificially generated otherness and the counterproductive results it brings about. This is where post-modernism as an abstract negation came in. Its objective was to vindicate precisely this kind of pseudo-heterogeneity — things such as academic multiculturalism as a New Class ideology — which, in providing essential internal control mechanisms to the system, was very functional for the reproduction of existing relations of domination.

Pan: But this heterogeneity occurs only on the level of the spectacle.

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Piccone: That is precisely the point. That is why it is artificial and phony. We had a discussion some time ago concerning TV miniseries such as *Roots* and *Holocaust* as paradigmatic of this kind of efforts to bureaucratically reconstitute community specificity. Clearly, both were attempts to reconstitute at the level of the spectacle the kind of particularity and specificity which in the 1950s and 1960s the same culture industry had systematically sought to eliminate in its drive to homogenize all cultural differences and thus create the kind of mass market needed by advanced capitalism. Both sought to legitimate, as otherness, Jewish and Black particularity in a way that would have been simply inconceivable earlier, during the years of "Ozzie and Harriet," when the culture industry was busy projecting an ideal WASP family structure . . .

Berman: I can't believe you are giving a liberal apology for the culture industry.

Piccone: Why is it an apology for the culture industry? It simply describes the kind of strategic adjustments which were made within the culture industry after the mid-1960s to ward off intensification of internal conflicts and, eventually, even self-destruction. According to this analysis, the spectacle self-destructs when and if it does the sort of thing that Debord thinks it is going to do, i.e., eradicate all autonomous experience. This is what we meant when we talked about the fact that the spectacle undermines the conditions necessary for its own reproduction. At some point, the spectacle itself tries to guarantee the reproduction of the conditions necessary for its perpetuation.

Berman: But then you are arguing solely on the level of the spectacle and idealism: as if the master, the culture industry, is busy reconstituting the servant by giving the servant identity through *Roots*, through *Holocaust*, through the various modes of artificial negativity. The question is whether this is a concession to really existing communities or a strategy to occupy and colonize communities in order to turn them, despite the trappings of diversity, into objects of domination.

Piccone: Obviously the latter.

Berman: OK, but then you are participating in the same kind of negative progressivism you berated in my account. In fact, it is not that different from Debord, to whom we may want to return. I quote, page 19: "For the agora, the general community, has gone, along with communities restricted to intermediary bodies or to independent institutions, to salons or cafés, or to workers in a single company. There is no place left where people can discuss the realities which concern them ,because they can never lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse and of the various forces organized to relay it. Nothing remains of the relatively independent judgement of those who once made up the world of learning; of those, for example, who

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used to base their self-respect on their ability to verify, . . ." There are two problems here. One is the suggestion of a progressive destruction of community, which we can recognize as a standard account of modernization, from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, but now run through Debord's spectacular thesis. What do we have to say about that? Clearly, this is the logic the spectacle tries to undertake, but we are also suggesting that it is less eradicationist than Debord imagines and that somehow community of some sort thrives despite this tendential totalitarianism of the spectacle. Second point: Debord seems to equate *agora* and community, i.e., marketplace and community. Is this his atavistic Marxism — that the central constitutive moment of community is market? Hence his fixation on the spread of the commodity form. His term is general community.

Piccone: What Debord is talking about is not community but the public sphere. For him, the community means a bunch of intellectuals sitting in Parisian cafés chewing the cud about the meaning of Being. It has nothing to do with peasants selling eggs and complaining about their mothers-in-law. It has nothing to do with populist discourse about everyday problems.

Berman: The point is not that he misunderstands *agora*; the point is that he gets community wrong, by collapsing it with *agora*. But then the ball is back in our court: can we articulate a theory of community beyond the marketplace? We are running into the same challenge to our theoretical enterprise to discuss community in a way that is neither romantic nostalgia nor existentialist conformism.

Pan: One way to consider this problem is by looking at how communities can construct history and maintain vital customs and traditions. In order for a community to maintain cohesion and reproduce itself, it must devalue outside constructions of its history and take charge of both tasks by recognizing itself as the arena for historical action and by emphasizing its traditions. These traditions cannot be thought of in terms of a unified history, but as the field upon which conflicts within the community can be played out. Moreover, such a tradition cannot be simply inherited, but must constantly be recreated and reworked. Consequently, *Roots* and *Holocaust*, to the extent that they perform this labor of reconstructing the past on the level of personal history, attempt to shift the focus of history away from the universal and toward the particular. Yet this attempt is disingenuous insofar as the particular histories portrayed become representative for the group. The elements of the group become immediately re-homogenized so that for each individual, personal history means ethnic history and ethnic history means a history of victimization. Such spectacular history-making thus extends the colonization of the community and prevents it from constructing its own identity.

Piccone: Both miniseries are excellent examples of artificial negativity back

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firing, precisely to the extent that, as products of the bureaucratic imagination, they could only mechanically extend what it imagines the past to have been, into a future it wishes to bring about. To the extent that by the 1960s the technologies of mass production developed a generation earlier had already been replaced by more differentiated alternatives able to meet the residual demand of a much more segmented market (which still resisted standardization and homogenization), the culture industry sought to recuperate the ethnic particularity it had already practically destroyed. But in so doing, and because of its lack of community feed-back mechanisms — organic negativity — the spectacle went bust in a context where only the lack of any real opposition prevented a major political crisis. The result was Reaganism: instead of the workers' councils we got the artificial state-dependent entrepreneur of the 1980s. As for *Holocaust* and *Roots*, they both sought to reconstitute mythical ethnic identities which no longer corresponded to the new identities partly constituted during the post WWII period by the spectacle's homogenization strategy. No longer rationalized by that opposition it had managed to destroy, the spectacle ended up resuscitating archaic particularisms based on long gone community relations. Thus, instead of facilitating the constitution of corporatist structures more susceptible to the kind of management Debord describes as "the integrated spectacle," it merely extended the crisis-ridden statist logic of the Welfare State. It reinforced moribund residues counterproductive to the constitution of a viable corporatist system better able to guarantee the retention of existing relations of domination. The ethnic particularities it fostered, which have since become the building-blocs of a bureaucratically orchestrated pseudo-pluralism, have nothing to do either with the projected autonomous corporatist entities, or with real community identities — based not on mere memories of what might have once been, but on new realities.

The point is that these efforts by the culture industry seemingly meant, for whatever ulterior systemic motives, to reconstitute particularistic identities, and thus well-managed communities, ultimately hastened their disintegration, while also failing to contribute to the realization of its latent goals. Contrary to what Debord thinks about the pervasiveness of the spectacle and its diabolical powers, it is in fact practically *bankrupt*. What saves it from further disintegration and marginalization is the fact that the community erosion brought about by the spectacle's impact a generation earlier had depleted otherness to the point that whatever resistance could develop could not effectively challenge even a bankrupt spectacle. Thus today not only does the spectacle no longer attempt to integrate all in terms of its abstract representations substituting for life, but its new efforts to artificially reconstitute particularistic identities also fail and contribute to the social disintegration it sought to contain. It has lost its bearing.

Berman: OK, but that is the easy critique of Debord — the spectacle is more complex than he suggests, because it always tries to reconstruct what he imagines it is erasing. But if we think it through only from its own standpoint, we

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have not really gone beyond Debord. What happens if we think it through on the level of community?

Piccone: But that was precisely why we attempted to come up with a more elaborate account of the logic of the spectacle than Debord provides. It is a process paralleled by the logic of reception and of community that takes place at a different level. In other words, the logic of the spectacle is not univocal. This is why the earlier discussion we had concerning Lasch's book, which focuses on what obtains beneath the spectacle, is so relevant.

Berman: Let's speculate for a moment. Are we to imagine a sort of two-track model of the social condition, with the spectacle above, the community below, the spectacle suppressing but also ineffectively attempting to reconstitute community? Can we not imagine it somehow differently, whereby community would play an active role *vis-à-vis* or even against the spectacle? In any case, a redistribution of power in the social condition, from spectacle to community? Certainly not an eschatological vision of the collapse of the two tracks, but rather — unlike in the present, where aspects of Debord's account do indeed ring true — ascribing to community a hegemonic role *vis-à-vis* the spectacle, rather than the other way around.

Piccone: Yes, but that presupposes that communities are able to withstand the onslaught of the spectacle much more than they have historically. We know for a fact that there has been a considerable erosion of communities, even if not even close to the extent that Debord thinks. Communities have resisted, but not as successfully as we would have hoped. There have been efforts to counter the pervasiveness of the spectacle, but these efforts have not been all that successfull.

Berman: Can we develop a general strategy of reempowering community?

Piccone: That is the point of a new populist politics.

Berman: Is there anything else we have to say about Debord?

Piccone: I think this discussion has gone way past Debord, who seems to have remained stuck with a bad reading of what the mid-1960s were about.

Berman: Can we predict anything about the reception of the *Comments*?

Piccone: It will probably be ignored by all but people like us, with a weakness for this kind of marginalia. It has nothing to say to the only possible constituency it may appeal to: Left-liberal academics, whose opportunistic political agenda has long since become statist, i.e., the articulation of their New Class

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interests. The present multicultural, post-modern strategy is much more useful for their purposes than the sort of paranoid scenarios Debord proposes.

Berman: Are we sure this is not the Manifesto of a new 1968?

Piccone: You have got to be kidding! The Mafia as the paradigm of the new type of organization? The *Comments* may be a kind of theoretical obituary for the various ultra-Left groups that flared up briefly and disastrously during the 1970s, in the same way that, as has been pointed out, *The Society of the Spectacle* and 1968 did not prefigure a new era but, rather, concluded an old one.

Berman And it got that wrong.

Mikhail Bakhtin and Otherness

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Politics, Intellectuals and the University

Frank Adler

The current crisis facing intellectuals and the university certainly is multifaceted and not reducible either to pat structuralist explanations or those which would simply treat the crisis as a reflection of the spiritual morass of our age (post-modernist ennui, the eclipse of metanarratives, the collapse of meaning, etc.). This crisis must be seen as rooted in the fall of those lines of demarcation which separate intellectuals from other groups on the basis of their practical activity, and the university from the state and all other institutions of civil society. In other words, what might very well be at stake is nothing less than the privileged particularity of intellectuals (their special status as bearers of universal knowledge, their distinctive claims as seekers of truth and excellence) and the privileged particularity of the university (its spatial autonomy from the state and other institutions of civil society, its traditional self-understanding as a cloistered refuge from the immediate interests and exigencies of society wherein enlightened discussion, free from external coercion, could take place). Pierre Bourdieu, recognizing the precarious position of intellectuals and the university, calls for a struggle for autonomy, yet his vision of a "republic of artists and intellectuals whose members have an interest in reason and truth," strikes me as hopelessly naive, given the lack of solidarity which his corporatist strategy presupposes.[1] Despite his recognition of "Trojan Horses" and "disloyal competition," Bourdieu fails to confront the disintegrative effects which the new politicization has had on the structure and spirit of intellectual life.

The counter-arguments that such traditional conceptions of intellectuals and the university in a critical forum belies bad faith and willing complicity in the self-interested swindle which the white male bourgeois professoriat has always used to deflect progressive, democratic challenges are well-known. Whether one consults the history and philosophy of modern science, the new social history, critical theory or Foucault's archeologies of knowledge, it is clear that intellectuals and the university never empirically conformed to the idealized

1. Pierre Bourdieu, "Intellectuals in the Modern World," *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989), pp. 103-104.

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conceptions elaborated above: all disciplines, to the degree they were institutionalized, drew authoritative lines and limited access; knowledge, as a form of social activity, necessarily reflects, to some degree, the preconceptions and interests of its participants, etc. Conservative resistance within the universities to new knowledge and the nasty nature of its internal power relations are also too well-known to merit further comment.

All this is old stuff, hardly radical or enlightening. What once presented itself as critique now seems to have degenerated into a two-bit sociology of knowledge when extended into a cuckoo land of ideological absurdity by the new politicized vulgarians who raucously disclaim that *everything* is essentially a question of interest and power, including knowledge; that there never has been, never will, never can possibly be any meaningful rationally-based, consensual, transcendent truth beyond mere interest and power. In short, everything is political and truth nothing but the result of self-interested conflicts. Scholarly integrity, from this perspective, is reduced to *a priori* solidarity with a particular group whose interests are to be promoted at the expense of other groups. Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of analytic sophistication, the price paid for this new politicized stance is the further collapse of that boundary which previously separated the university as a privileged, autonomous sphere from the immediate, direct and potentially controlling forces of the larger society. This is a "further collapse" because the state, as others have already pointed out, has already violated the university's autonomy and commandeered or sponsored entire branches of knowledge for its own purposes (to service the welfare apparatus, to help steer the economy, war-related research, etc.). The type of politicization I referred to above is being promoted by agents within the university both to undermine any remaining intellectual solidarity (which is seen by them as necessarily wrong and oppressive, as in all the monotonous rhetoric concerning "the canon") and marshall forces outside campus walls for their own ends. To them the university has no particularity, it is simply a microcosm of the larger society. Rejecting the privileged particularity of the university, the new politicized agents within the university have an instrumentalist view of education, oriented singlemindedly toward solving social problems and promoting social equity. For them, knowledge and the university are instruments in the service of something else, much like old-time socialists who would refer to Marxism as a tool in the hands of the working class. This does not preclude, of course, narrow self-interest, self-promotion and careerism on their part, masked by high-minded commitments to purportedly progressive goals, thus increasing employment opportunities within the academy on the narrow basis of class, race, ethnicity or gender . . . no doubt an unintended consequence of their selfless action. Though the two types of politicization — one from the state, external; the other from within campus walls — are analytically distinct, they often interpenetrate and reinforce one another in such areas as affirmative action. In fact, it is precisely this collaboration between agents within the campus walls and the state, both

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committed to eliminating the autonomy and particularity of the university, which so dramatically differentiates the "new" politicization from that which was experienced during the 1960s, when activism was directed primarily against state policy, bureaucratic rationality and cultural conformism.

If intellectual activity and the university never empirically conformed to the idealized conceptions, why underscore their particularity, let alone justify their privileged autonomy? Firstly, for heuristic purposes one might begin with ideals in order to introduce categories which might be helpful in making sense of the current crisis. Secondly, such conceptions have served historically as normative ideals, reflecting how intellectual activity *ought* to be practiced and how the university *ought* to be structured. The fact that empirical reality fell short of expectations does not necessarily invalidate the truth value of the ideals themselves.

At the very outset, it should be recognized that there is an essential tension between these idealized conceptions of intellectual activity and the university, on the one hand, and what some might see as the premises of democracy, on the other. The tension is not merely logical (the one committed to excellence, the other to equality), but historical as well. The university as an institution is pre-democratic; its origins date back to the emergence of town life during the Middle Ages. Pre-democratic in origin, it was additionally non-democratic in structure; that is, universities were essentially *collegial* formations, autonomous both from ambitious monarchs and the *demos*. The internal logic of this collegial formation was neither bureaucratic nor egalitarian; ultimate scholarly authority was vested neither in administrative superiors (persons) nor submitted to a simple counting of votes. Within this *collegium,* authority was based on the examination of evidence, contestation, and the eventual arrival at a consensus regarding the better argument among qualified and recognized participants. In fact, when Bourdieu refers to the distinctive domain of intellectual life, he harkens back to this formative and characteristically collegial sense of university life, "competition among its participants is organized in such a manner that no one can succeed over anyone else, except by means of better *arguments*, *reasonings* and *demonstrations*, thereby advancing reason and truth."[2]

Max Weber's sociology sheds a good deal of light on the historical transformations which weakened collegial bodies and led to the victory of bureaucratic organization. Whereas collegial bodies, monopolizing specialized training and knowledge, initially managed to preserve their autonomy and keep dilettantish monarchs in check, with the development of royal bureaucracies collegial bodies found themselves challenged and then supplanted by a technically superior mode of organization, the very embodiment of formal rationality. "Bureaucratic authority in the modern world has, wherever it has developed in large-scale associations such as states or metropolitan cities, everywhere led to a weakening of the role of collegiality in effective control. Collegiality unavoidably obstructs the promptness of decision, the consistency of policy, the clear responsibility of

2. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

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the individual, the ruthlessness to outsiders in combination with the maintenance of discipline within the group."[3] Weber also demonstrated how bureaucracy and mass democracy, though based on opposing principles, historically marched hand-in-hand as modern democratic states were expected to address a greater range of social problems, necessitating the creation and growth of bureaucratic agencies. This relentless bureaucratization of life, more than anything else, led to Weber's fatalistic pessimism regarding Western development; nothing could compete with bureaucracy's rational mastery or prevent bureaucracy from extending itself and absorbing all aspects of life. There was no otherness to that bureaucratization which would lead eventually to an iron cage and a polar night of mechanized petrification.

And yet a number of collegial bodies, such as the university, survived and became indispensable to the functioning of modern democracies *precisely because they were inherently non-bureaucratic* and could attend to normative, qualitative and evaluative problems not susceptible to the neat and simple bureaucratic criteria of efficiency and optimality. One thinks immediately of the courts as one historical example, or even more modern "guild-like" professional associations like the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association which, whatever one thinks of them politically, perform public functions (e.g., certification) backed ultimately by state authority, yet remain autonomous from the bureaucratic control of the state or popularly-elected legislative bodies. One should consider the university in this context which is indispensable primarily because it is non-bureaucratic and attends to those essential things with which calculating bureaucracies could not appropriately deal: problems of substance, meaning, truth, justice, beauty, etc. It follows, then, that the value of universities to society lies in what they do and what they are *because* they are so inherently different from the homogenizing bureaucratic structures of mass democracies. It also follows that if universities are to serve society, they must remain autonomous and not blend into the bureaucratic woodwork. Yet if universities are to remain autonomous, they must be able to reproduce the conditions of their distinctive existence and not become microcosms of the larger society or instruments of bureaucratic control.

Here the contradictions between the university and affirmative action become evident; the one committed to excellence and distinctiveness, the other to social equity and uniformity. Even if one admits that selection on the qualitative basis of merit was also historically contaminated with such extraneous factors as race, gender, ethnicity, class and religion, as well as athletic ability or familial relations to alumni, the question is which was essential to the mission and inner logic of the university as such, and which was historically contingent and variable. There is no doubt here as to the primacy and essential role of excellence.

Affirmative action is committed to the bureaucratic enforcement of social

3. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Talcott Parsons, ed. and trans. (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 402.

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equality which, however commendable as a political goal, is strikingly at odds with a collegial institution whose goals, inner-logic and recruitment procedures are intrinsically related to the commitment to excellence. Not all institutions and occupational domains are so distinctively committed to excellence; in fact, few are. For example, when affirmative action is applied to municipal police forces or fire departments, no one seriously claims that excellence, rather than minimal competence, is at issue. And it makes sense that if, for example, thirty percent of a city is black, roughly thirty percent of its police, firefighters, etc. ought to be black. Once again, the criterion is not excellence, but minimal competence. Superimposing this logic, however, on the university would violate and eventually undermine the very distinctiveness which allows the university to be autonomous, non-bureaucratic, and of particular value to society. It would turn the university into another post office or federal office building. The logic of proportional representation, on which affirmative action is based, is fundamentally quantitative. When bureaucratically applied to the university, it necessarily tends to reduce questions of quality to quantitative representation.

Recent reports on affirmative action at Berkeley highlight the consequences aggressive affirmative action programs can have at quality institutions. Only 40% of the entering class is now admitted on academic grounds alone (this group is overwhelmingly white and Asian); the other 60% is admitted on the basis of "non-traditional criteria" (this group is overwhelmingly black and Hispanic). Less than 3% of the entering freshman who were admitted on the basis of academic qualifications alone were Hispanic or black, while approximately 90% percent of those students who did not meet Berkeley's academic index standards were members of these groups. Obviously, the vast majority of minority students are not admitted on the basis of strong, or even comparable, academic qualifications. One effect of this set-aside policy has been to accentuate competition for places among the 40% admitted on academic grounds alone, meaning that only the very brightest of the white and Asian students have a chance at being admitted. Consequently, after admission, poorly qualified blacks and Hispanics must make it through a rigorous academic program, competing with super-qualified whites and Asians. Marked disparities in grade point averages and graduation rates reflect these differences. Fewer blacks graduated from Berkeley last year than ten years ago, despite the fact that black enrollment more than doubled.[4]

It is hard to believe that poorly qualified minority students are well-served by such programs, or that the quality and integrity of Berkeley's academic program

4. An excellent analysis of Berkeley's affirmative action program is John H. Bunzel, "Affirmative-action admissions: how it works at UC Berkeley," *The Public Interest* (Fall 1988), pp. 111-129. See also Andrew Hacker, "Affirmative Action: The New Look," *New York Review of Books*, October 12, 1989, pp. 63-68. On discrimination against Asian students at select colleges and universities see Grace Tsuang, "Assuring Equal Access of Asian Americans to Highly Selective Universities," *Yale Law Journal*, (January 1989), pp. 659-671.

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can be sustained. Moreover, racial and ethnic animosity has increased. Whites and Asian high school students who were encouraged to work hard and get good grades to get into Berkeley now find that only few of them will make it, resenting the blacks and Hispanics who were admitted without having made comparable effort. White students resent the Asians against whom they are competing for fewer places, while the Asians resent additional discriminatory measures (similar to quotas placed on Jewish students in the 1920s) which penalize them for being "overrepresented" relative to their number in the general population. Unlike other minorities, Asian applicants do not seek special consideration because of their race, but demand equal treatment despite their race. The final irony of affirmative action's encouragement of diversity is that more black students might be finding traditional black colleges an attractive alternative to the many predominantly white institutions which are recruiting minority students only to meet politically-mandated affirmative action goals. Black colleges and universities have significantly lower drop-out rates and higher graduation rates. While black colleges enroll 16% of all black students, they award 40% of the degrees earned by blacks.[5] Given the racial climate on American campuses today, it might well be that only at black colleges can black students be judged strictly on merit, that an A is an A, and an F is an F — the way it ought to be at an academic institution committed to excellence.

If the autonomy of the university is based upon its capacity to reproduce the conditions of its existence, and if excellence is central to the university's mission, then affirmative action is a threat to the university's autonomy. First, factors other than excellence are mandated by external forces; second, these factors have in actuality led to a decline in standards; third, limited funds are diverted away from the university's central mission into campus-based affirmative action recruitment and compliance bureaucracies, and, of course, the provision of remedial programs for students who are simply not prepared to pursue regular university studies. Affirmative action in faculty recruitment also threatens the autonomy of the university to the degree that excellence is compromised by hiring according to criteria other than merit (i.e., hiring on the basis of ascriptive attributes such as race, ethnicity or gender in order to redress the social composition of the faculty). I have known faculty search committees, for example, which routinely set aside all white male applicants, no matter how qualified, in order to ensure that women and minorities would be hired. More recently, it has been argued that affirmative action should be a relevant factor in personnel review decisions as well, that performance alone should not determine whether a professor gets renewed, tenure or promotion, but additionally how the outcome of a particular decision would affect the social composition of a given department, academic division, or the faculty at large.

The new politicization, and particularly the "agents from within" are threatening the integrity and autonomy of the university. Here I have in mind

5. Bunzel, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

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two groups which tend to overlap. First, those uncritical supporters of affirmative action who care more for changing the university's social composition into a mirror image of some ideal race-gender-ethnic balance than they do for what qualitatively goes on within campus walls, and who care more for what groups will comprise the faculty and student body than why faculty and students are engaged in intellectual activity in the first place. Second, those who reject any critical dialogue with traditional disciplines and approaches, seeing these as little more than corrupt vestiges of patriarchy or eurocentrism, and feeling no solidarity with intellectuals or the university in general, but only with their exclusive, self-referential subcultures whose specific interests alone are to be advanced. Such intemperate balkanization makes university life impossible because universal knowledge requires universalizing orientations, cross-fertilization, and openmindedness. Despite its formalism, Habermas' universal pragmatics, discursive ethics, and understanding of emancipation as conversation free from coercion strikes at the heart of intellectual activity and university life. While his extension of these concepts to the larger society is problematic at best, and some might joke that Habermas' concept of the good life is a seminar room, where else but the university is the good life discussed or even relevant? This notion of intellectual activity and the university is anything but closed, static or rigid, despite the existence and inescapable necessity of canons on which ground new critiques are born. The discussion necessarily goes on as it always did and always will.

Ivory Tower and Red Tape: Reply to Adler

David Pan

Adler's discussion of university affirmative action is driven by two contradictory imperatives: a commitment to the objectivity of truth and a desire to preserve communal structures which have been threatened by the process of rationalization associated with the notion of universal truth. He focuses on the extent to which the rationalization described by Weber has destroyed traditional and communal structures and asks whether the university or affirmative action accelerates or inhibits this destruction. His objection to affirmative action

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is predicated on a defense of the non-bureaucratic structure of the university as antithetical to the type of homogenization and politicization implied by affirmative action. In the interests of a particularist political agenda, affirmative action undermines academic standards as well as the university's non-bureaucratic collegiality. The contradiction in Adler's argument between a set of universal standards and the particularity of a collegial community forces his attack on affirmative action into a defense of particularist university interests whose alleged universality turns out to be an apology for the university's otherwise unjustifiable privileges.

Universality and Collegiality

From the very beginning, Adler does not make an argument against affirmative action, but, rather, defends the "privileged particularity of the university" as a preserver of truth against bureaucratization. This defense of the ivory tower is predicated on a critique of bureaucracy which sets up the university as a "collegial" body opposed to bureacratic ones and traces this distinction to the medieval university: "Within this *collegium*, authority was based on the examination of evidence, contestation, and the eventual arrival at a consensus regarding the better argument among qualified and recognized paticipants. In fact, when Bourdieu refers to the distinctive domain of intellectual life, he harkens back to this formative and characteristically collegial sense of university life, 'competition among its participants is organized in such a manner that no one can succeed over anyone else, except by means of better *arguments*, *reasoning* and *demonstrations*, thereby advancing reason and truth'." By recycling the Habermasian ideal speech situation and emphasizing the continuity of the university tradition, Adler's nostalgic description conflates these two models and ends up undermining both. The Habermasian model of truth is a liberal one which depends upon the ability of a limited group of participants to represent the interests of society as a whole and, consequently, upon the successful mediation between speakers and non-speakers, in this case, the university and the society. The claim to universality is a limited one which presupposes the ability of mediating institutions such as the press and the educational system to guarantee a certain identity between the linguistically competent actors and the rest of society. But because this Habermasian model encourages such mediation along with the bureaucratic institutions needed to guarantee communication between different social groups, Adler attempts to transform this bureaucratic model into a communal one by laying claim to a Habermasian universality, but at the same time insisting upon the university's collegial, i.e. its traditional, and non-democratic character. This conflation of liberal and traditional models allows Adler to insist on both the universality of truth as well as the need to maintain a strict separation between the university and the rest of society. This attempt to lend his parochialism a "universal" justification and his universality a cozy collegiality confuses the terms of the two models and comes close to Allan Bloom's vision of the university. By isolating

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the university community from social exigencies, Adler robs Habermasian universal truth of the intersubjective nexus necessary to insure its legitimacy. Thus, his notion of universal truth can only justify itself to itself in a quasi-religious language in which intellectuals are lauded as "bearers of universal knowledge" and "seekers of truth and excellence." Adler's justification for the autonomy of university research is ultimately based on tradition and, in appealing to the medieval university, becomes mired in a feudal justification of separation, whose ultimate goal is the safeguarding of university privileges.

Arguing that the university's separation from the rest of society must be preserved in order to guarantee its continuing collegiality and its status as a preserver of truth, Adler absolves the university of the social responsibilities borne by the rest of society, which, for him, is terminally bureaucratic. Consequently, he does not have any objections to affirmative action outside the academy: "when affirmative action is applied to municipal police forces or fire departments, no one seriously claims that excellence, rather than minimal competence, is at issue. And it makes sense that if, e.g., 30% of a city is black, roughly 30% of its police, firefighters, etc. ought to be black." Ignoring both the bureaucratic character of the university and the importance of standards outside the university, Adler's distinction between university and society allows him to condemn affirmative action in the university while supporting it elsewhere. This exemption of the university from problems confronted by the rest of society removes pressure from the university to debate affirmative action as an issue directly affecting its functioning while at the same time supporting its implementation outside the university. The retreat from social issues within the university complements a willingness to acquiesce to predominant relations of domination within the rest of society, demonstrating the compatibility of Adler's collegiality with bureaucratic manipulation and an eradicationist universalism.

Particularity and Particularism

In claiming that "the value of universities to society lies in what they do and what they are *because* they are so inherently different from the homogenizing bureaucratic structures of mass democracies," Adler uses an Adornian argument, assuming, first, that bureaucracies have eradicated all particularity and left only a seamlessly administered world and, second, that the university's mission is to safeguard a space free of bureaucratic penetration. This presupposes a totally administered society homogenized to the point that only withdrawal from it can preserve particularity and heterogeneity. Not only has this thesis been fully discredited by the breakdown of Soviet bureaucracy and the now evident persistence of ethnic and religious forces long thought to have been administered out of existence, Adler distorts Adorno's argument beyond recognition by placing the site of an intractable particularity in the university. Not bothering to make the effort of going into the world to harness particularity, he simply defines autonomous knowledge as itself particular and remains oblivious to the conflict between universal knowledge and particular

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experiences Adorno sought to address. For Adorno, the university, as institutionalized intellect, was both theoretically and practically opposed to particularity. His idea of particularity was constructed precisely in opposition to pure intellect and the estrangement of mental from physical labor. Accordingly, he chose not the university but *art* as the site of an intractable particularity because it incorporates, even at its most autonomous, an experiential, non-rational element.[1] However, this incorporation of the experiential could never be accomplished directly, but is always predicated on the impossibiity of identity between experience and intellect, even in the work of art. Consequently, Adorno always conceived of the mediation of experience as a source of conflict within the art work which destabilized formal rules and categories.

In contrast to this complex attempt to mediate between experience and intellect, Adler's position is self-contradictory in its attempt to defend "the privileged particularity of the university, based on the autonomy of knowledge and the need to protect the very conditions which make such autonomy possible." This "privileged particularity of the university" can only make sense in Adler's argument if "particularity" is not taken to mean "the quality of being particular as opposed to general or universal," but rather "personal interest or advantage" of the intellectual who wishes to shut the doors of the university in order to artificially guarantee its privileges and shield it from public criticism. Curiously, it is precisely such a replacement of legitimate academic interests with opportunistic ones which Adler purports to attack. Unfortunately, the vociferousness of this attack belies its intentions. Adler seeks, first, to ban politics and power from ideal intellectual activity and disparages the "disintegrative effects which the new politicization has had on the structure and spirit of intellectual life." He describes this new politicization in terms of a Foucaultian collapse of knowledge and power, and a factual liberal consensus within the university and the state. Citing and distorting Habermas' ideal speech situation, Adler rejects the linkage of knowledge and power while himself engaging in academic *Realpolitik*.

Though Adler is justified in objecting to a political pre-determination of the results of research and to the rejection of certain results simply because they do not conform to a particular "politically correct" perspective, he overlooks the role of politics in determining the directions and topics of research. A student's decision to study history rather than biology, a history professor's decision to study the role of women in the Weimar Republic rather than the role of the American presidency during the Cold War, and a university's decision to increase funding for the biology department rather than the history department are motivated, not by standards of truth, but by political concerns. These types of decisions, which are an integral part of all research but which cannot be discussed without reference to social exigencies external to the university, makes any idea of "pure science" a contradiction in terms. The interests of the researcher,

1. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 6-11.

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though not always directly dictated by a federal or corporate grant, always reflect social exigencies. The claim to be able to separate one from the other is a power move designed to obscure the social and political nature of academic research in order to pursue a particular agenda independently of public scrutiny.

Diversity

The political character of the decision to pursue particular directions in research makes it crucial for universities to continually renew their relations to society in order to remain vital institutions. Not only should the directions of university research be an issue of public debate, but university students could be seen as the mediators between academia and the larger society.[2] It is the students, after all, who are constantly changing, i.e., entering and graduating, and whose perceptions reflect a wider cross-section of society than the "lifers" of academia. Increased emphasis on undergraduate teaching would not only redirect the university toward its primary goal of education — at least in some parts of the humanities — but also revitalize research by forcing teachers to reflect upon their interests by confronting them with students' needs and, by extension, those of society at large. As far as the university goes, the attempt to increase diversity on the campus, and thus include a more representative sampling of society, is not, as Adler contends and as affirmative action has made it, a merely *quantitative* procedure. The issue of diversity is tied to the issue of intellectual vitality and must be understood also as the attempt to mediate betweeen experience and intellect.

Yet the form this mediation takes is predicated on a basic antagonism between university and community which has existed since the university's beginnings. The typical relation has not been one in which the university enlightens or assists the community but rather one in which the university produces knowledge and state administrators to control the community. Affirmative action fits into this repressive pattern to the extent that it was introduced and forced through universities by the federal government[3] as a way of artificially recreating the impulse for changes in universities to respond to social pressures.

As a result, the affirmative action establishment of race and gender goals has undermined university structures and standards while exacerbating racism in society at large. An increase in diversity within the university can only be productive to the extent that it corresponds to the inner dynamics of the university where certain disciplines are established and gain in size or importance according to the unique character of their research and teaching. In contrast, the "diversity" of race and gender afforded by affirmative action does not correspond to any organic distinctions within the university but,

2. Cf. Russell A. Berman, "*Perestroika* for the University!" in *Telos* 81 (Fall, 1989).

3. For a description of the federal government's role in forcing the implementation of affirmative action at major universities, see John H. Bunzel, "Minority Faculty Hiring: Problems and Prospects" in *The American Scholar*, Vol. 59, (Winter 1990), pp. 39-52.

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rather, to bureaucratically determined categories of social differentiation which do not necessarily hold in society. Consequently, the statistical diversity of race and gender amongst faculty and students does not promise any diversity at all for the university. In fact, by compromising standards, it even increases homogenization within the university by reducing the options for accepting intellectually diverse candidates and by reinforcing a static race and gender understanding of diversity which would substitute for a proliferation of interests and methods. A similar process occurs outside the university where affirmative action's attempt to eliminate discrimination exemplifies the Foucaultian thesis that precisely that knowledge which is touted as emancipatory is in fact used as a means of watching over and controlling the community. While the goal in affirmative action is to engineer a situation where universal justice and opportunity exist and race is not a factor in hiring and admissions, the kind of record-keeping entailed by affirmative action's bureaucratic attempt to rectify racial imbalances ends up dividing applicants for study and teaching into racial categories, thus reinforcing the kind of identification by race which affirmative action is intended to stop. Though this categorization may have begun as an administrative expedient, it has encouraged the polarization of campus politics in terms of those artificial, state-sponsored categories, demonstrating the futility of attempts to ameliorate racism by administrative fiat. Instead of eradicating racial discrimination and achieving social justice, affirmative action sets up an extensive system of surveillance over race and enforces racial and ethnic categories of organization which lead, at best, to the destruction of the organic relations which might otherwise have developed in the community according to the motivations, tensions and affinities inherent in it and, at worst, to ethnic war.[4] Moreover, the concentration on administrative expedients to solve problems of discrimination and social inequality diverts attention from the much more difficult and crucial tasks of reforming the public school system and of upgrading ghetto communities.

As already indicated, autonomy and particularity are, contrary to Adler, actually two opposed goals. But because of the contradictory nature of affirmative action programs, it has brought together those groups defending "autonomy" with those defending "particularity." The former, in their clumsy attempt to abolish discrimination based on race and gender differences, end up institutionalizing the very categories they sought to eradicate, while the latter, in their clumsy attempt to introduce a diversity of experience into the university, end up reinforcing not community-generated but administratively-established categories of differentiation.

In the face of this failure of affirmative action, Adler's call to "return" to the days when "truth," not race, was the main issue at the university, though it does recognize the necessary separation of the university from the community,

4. For a discussion of the consequences of affirmative action all over the world, see Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Politics: An International Perspective* (New York: W. Morrow, 1990).

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nevertheless seems to echo the old communists' call to return to the days of one-party bureaucratic rule in the Soviet Union. In both cases, the failure of a bureaucratic reform attempt results in the "oppositional" call for a return to administrative isolation in order to halt the deterioration of values. Adler attempts to obscure the proximity of his position with that of a bureaucratic state by emphasizing the importance of collegiality. Yet, recent revelations about collegial solidarity that existed, e.g., among members of East Germany's secret police force indicate that collegiality and bureaucracy might not be as incompatible as Adler suggests. In fact, his idea of a collegial isolation resembles most closely the "old boys' network" of elite universities which works to combine collegial solidarity with exclusionary mechanisms to protect power and privileges.

University and Community

If affirmative action has succeeded in tying the discussion of diversity within the university to the issue of the university's openness to the community surrounding it, the identification by race has obscured the problem of community and in fact replaced the mediation of university and community with the artificial diversity created by affirmative action goals. Though putting an end to affirmative action programs and rigorously enforcing equal opportunity in hiring and admissions would address the problem of an exacerbation of racial tensions resulting from the attention to race encouraged by affirmative action, this second problem of the university's alienation from communities is much more difficult to address. Because of the basic split between university and community, the particularist attempt to bring the two together by reconstructing within the university a mirror image of stratification and division in society merely reproduces this social stratification and antagonism within the university, thereby universalizing and solidifying such distinctions both in the university and the community. Such a solidification of distinctions is as counter-productive for the university as is the attempt to define social divisions along the lines of racial categories for the community. In both cases, a direct transfer of categories from one realm to the other not only fails to consider the peculiarities of each, but more importantly, in fixing these lines of division as categories, destroys the fluid dynamics which are the basis of their uniqueness.

The basic and unbridgeable gap between the university and the community originates as a separation of those who enter the university from any community they may have been tied to earlier. It is only by drawing people out of the communities in which they were raised that a university can develop a vital community of its own, arising out of the tension between the different perspectives and funds of experience brought to it by its members. Thus the transposition of social diversity into the university cannot be a simple duplication within the university of specific groups which presumably exist in society, but rather a development of a mode of interaction which is possible within the university and nowhere else and which serves to promote an intellectual exchange between people of varying backgrounds who nevertheless make up a unique

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university community. This model of diversity depends on the absence of an administrative fixation of boundaries between different perspectives and on the idea that true particularity is always a continuing dynamic and critical exchange impossible to either duplicate or categorize.

The vitality of this exchange depends on the extent to which it manifests itself as debate on all levels of the university, and not just within administrative or faculty committees. Here, the issue is whether curriculum decisions and departmental hiring are also subject to an affirmative action logic whereby specific courses or readings are made by the university administration into student requirements, effectively stifling both the students' and the faculty's opportunity to debate and decide for themselves which courses and departments offer the most engaging and pedagogically worthwhile material and perspectives. Whether the university maintains a set of Western or African culture requirements, the end result will always be a funneling of students into courses and departments which do not necessarily merit such artificially sustained enrollment. Just as affirmative action hiring must ultimately give certain groups unfair advantages, affirmative action curriculums artificially inflate enrollment in certain courses and lend those courses and departments an undeserved prominence which could otherwise only be earned either by creating courses and curricula which genuinely address student interests or through real growth of a particular discipline.

This is not an argument against multiculturalism but, rather, an argument against any administratively-determined requirements dictating the contents of a cultural tradition which should be a subject of constant debate. Such an abolishing of reading list requirements should not necessitate, nor even encourage, a dissolving of Western culture programs. Rather, universities should maintain a variety of cultural programs as options for students to choose instead of requirements for them to fulfill. Such a revision of university requirements would allow only those transformations of university curricula which correspond to changes in social and academic interests and needs, as evidenced by people choosing to work with previously neglected materials. The justification for an increase in the size of any department or sub-field would be a growth in student interest documented by enrollment and a growth in the different specializations current in the field as a whole.

As for the students, the shifting of emphasis of an introductory program toward the teaching of critical skills would increase "cultural literacy" much more effectively than a program whose goal is the simple transmission of contents. Rather than focussing on the "affirmation" of any particular contents, the task of the university is to teach the judicial "negation" of all contents. A student thereby equipped to confront all elements of tradition critically will then be in a better position to independently evaluate and appropriate other traditions. Instead of reserving for itself the role of defining a cultural tradition, the university would thereby enable others to appropriate traditions for themselves.

If the emergence of the university community marks its separation from its social surroundings, the university's legitimacy depends on its ability to justify

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this separation, not just to itself, but also to the rest of society by providing to the community the tools for the task of defining and transmitting a cultural tradition without carrying out this task for it. The community's independent definition and appropriation of cultural traditions constitutes the link to the past which is essential for maintaining its stability and vitality. This past transcends present constraints and provides it with an objective fund of history which on the one hand places restraints on present actions but on the other hand provides possibilities and alternatives. If university collegiality depends on the continued renewal and transformation of its governing traditions, the same also holds for collegiality outside the university. As opposed to this model, Adler's idea of universality and objective truth, by isolating the university, stifles any renewal, leaving behind only an aging professoriat, jealous of its privileges and desperately clinging to its claim to represent a "higher realm" of truth untainted by the complexities of mundane experience. Affirmative action, in sacrificing the university's critical stance toward tradition, paralyzes diverse communities outside the university in order to categorize and preserve them in the bureaucratic formaldehyde of statistical racial balance. Paradoxically, the fostering of either university traditions or dynamic communities depends, in each case, not on a stubborn defense of either, but on a disavowal of each for the sake of the other.

Artificial Negativity and Affirmative Action in Universities

Emery M. Roe

Where did affirmative action go? Even minority faculty who have presumably benefited from these programs are increasingly critical of them. A recent report of an advisory committee on Latino issues wrote to the president of the University of California about the "elaborate and time-consuming affirmative action monitoring procedures"[1] for staff on some of the university's campuses and

1. The report's quotes are taken from *The Challenge: A Plan for Universitywide Diversity*, a report prepared by the Committee on the University of California SCR 43 Task Force and distributed by the University of California Consortium on Mexico and the US (Riverside, CA: 1989), pages 31, 2, 5 (of the authors' cover-letter), and 9, respectively.

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complained that the "University is tangled in a web of numbers and affirmative action policies for which only a few of its members feel responsible and trapped in a morass of special programs which put only particular individuals, usually minorities themselves, on the front lines." The authors conclude that the "University's efforts as an institution to increase the representation of Hispanics and other minorities among the faculty clearly have not been successful. The Committee sensed that in many instances affirmative action policies and procedures by which they are managed actually contribute to hiring decisions which are hardly affirmative. . . . It is possible that stringent justification, defense of hiring and promotion decisions, and fear of challenge are leading to the employment of more white males and fewer minorities and women. . . . The Committee recommends, therefore, a systemwide examination of the effectiveness of affirmative action, as defined in the University and by federal law, to determine to what extent current [affirmative action] procedures serve as deterrent to the University's objectives [of hiring more minorities and women]."

They argue that where affirmative action procedures "obstruct the appointment of qualified minority faculty, new procedures must be set in place." Such calls evolve all too frequently into calls for more bureaucracy. To paraphrase Paul Piccone: if the experience of EPA, OSHA and the DOD are any guide, much-needed and well-meaning efforts to challenge and rationalize existing affirmative action procedures could well end up precipitating even more bureaucratic regulations, which in turn require further rationalization and bureaucratization at a later date.[2] This observation would border on the banal, were it not for the dynamic generating this widening muck of hyper-regulation. In Piccone's terms, the current affirmative action bureaucracy needs critics such as the authors of the Latino report whose "opposition" and proposals are taken to justify the bureaucracy's continued existence and expansion: "Far from being persecuted, the lingering opposition now needs to be supported to keep functional a bureaucracy in a state of fatal involution. Counter-bureaucratic bureaucracies become one of the paradoxical expressions of artificially-generated negativity. The problem with this system-generated negativity is that, to the extent that it is itself bureaucratically sanctioned, it tends to become an extension of the very bureaucracy in need of control. Consequently, caught in the

2. Paul Piccone, "The Crisis of American Conservatism," *Telos* 74 (Winter 1987-88), p. 7. Another University of California report dealing with faculty affirmative action notes a similar phenomenon: "A cycle appears to exist which consists of the discovery of the lack of compliance, then the development of a new set of affirmative action plans and goals, followed by a period of neglect. Then the cycle begins again, with the rediscovery of the lack of compliance, the development of a new affirmative action plan and goals, followed by another period of neglect." See *Report of the Task Force to Review Affirmative Action within the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources* (Office of the President, Berkeley, CA, 1988), p. 23. How overregulation leads to underregulation in OSHA and the DOD has been discussed in John Mendeloff, *The Dilemma of Toxic Substance Regulation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988) and William Gregory, *The Defense Procurement Mess* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Company, 1989).

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paperwork of funding, reporting, justifying, etc., it simply extends the bureaucratic logic it was meant to challenge and becomes counter-productive."[3]

For Piccone, the implication is clear. "The organic negativity necessary to successfully sustain this challenge [against the aforementioned bureaucratic logic] must develop *outside* the bureaucratic administrative framework."[4] He pushes the argument further, though, in the case of affirmative action. Here, artificial negativity has reduced the chances of organic negativity ever arising. Affirmative action, Piccone writes, "presupposed, as conditions for implementing and enforcing its provisions, an expansion of the same bureaucratic apparatus whose penetration of everyday life, in the process of erasing all particularity and otherness and thus creating the homogenized labor and consumer markets needed by the new system of mass production, has managed to obliterate that minimal organic negativity required for self-regulation. Instead of contributing to a *reduction* of the increasingly wasteful and irrational state, which embodies all of the system's traditional evils, the 'new and improved' social movements [such as affirmative action] ended up contributing to its further *extension*."[5] The remainder of this note takes exception to Piccone's conclusions and uses faculty affirmative action to show why exception is necessary. To put it sharply, just as any system of budget controls is a roadmap to cheating on them, so too does the logic of artificial negativity map its own subversion into organic negativity. How such a transformation might be effected is clearer when organization theory is used to re-think the notion of bureaucracy underlying the artificial negativity thesis in general and Piccone's affirmative action critique in particular. Two provisos, however, have to be made explicit from the outset. In order to maintain some kind of consistency throughout the argument, case material and examples will continue to focus on the University of California, though no pretence is being made that this material is generalizable to all UC departments or to major public and private universities elsewhere. In related fashion, the following account is not intended to explain all outcomes in every affirmative action program, but rather those cases where performance in hiring female and minority faculty falls short of program targets and stated goals.

Just What Kind of Bureaucracy Are We Talking About?

Artificial negativity assumes that bureaucracy is tightly coupled and linearly interactive; in reality large university bureaucracies, at least in the US, are better understood as loosely coupled and complexly interactive.

In Charles Perrow's terminology, a tightly-coupled system is (1) highly time-dependent in not allowing for delays or unexpected contingencies; (2) fairly invariant in terms of the sequence of activities required (i.e., B depends upon A

3. Paul Piccone, "The Crisis of One-Dimensionality," *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978), p. 48.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Paul Piccone, "Reinterpreting 1968: Mythology on the Make," *Telos* 77 (Fall 1988), p. 40.

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having been completed first); (3) inflexible in the way its objectives are by and large achieved (not only is the sequence of specific activities restricted, but there is only one prescribed way to achieve the overall goal desired); and (4) characterized by little slack and resources available to tolerate delays, stoppages and the unexpected when they do occur. In loosely-coupled systems, delays are not only possible, but often common; sequences of activities are by no means invariant (e.g., in a university it does not much matter when some course requirements are met); many ways to achieve a common goal are available; and sufficient slack exists to tolerate a degree of waste without imperiling bureaucratic survival in the process. Complexly interactive systems are those with unfamiliar, unplanned or unexpected sequences of activities that often are either not visible or immediately comprehensible. The sequences of activities in linearly interactive systems are by contrast much more familiar and expected and are quite visible and comprehensible even if unplanned or unintended.[6]

Perrow specifically argues that universities "are quite loosely-coupled. If something goes wrong . . . there is plenty of time for recovery, nor do things have to be in precise order . . . [Moreover] there are multiple functions — teaching, research, and public service, for example — and they can interact in unexpected ways. Indeed, they are expected to; synergistic interactions are desired, though 'negative synergy' is also possible."[7] This "negative synergy" resurfaces in the discussion of affirmative action, but for the moment it is important to note that Perrow is not alone in his description of large university bureaucracies. In fact, the very term, "loosely-coupled," entered the organization literature in the 1970s largely as a result of efforts by other organization theorists and social psychologists to describe and conceptualize American educational institutions.[8]

Universities are not without their tightly-coupled processes. As has been noted on a number of occasions, controls over matters of certification — who is a tenured professor, a graduate student, a philosophy major — have in the past been much tighter than those over on-site inspection and supervision of classroom instruction.[9] Similarly, universities are tightly coupled to their wider environment by virtue of having institutionalized the legal and normative rules of the society in which and for which they work.[10] What really makes universities loosely coupled overall, however, is not the at-times weak connections between personal certification and actual classroom performance, but the more radical

6. This paragraph draws heavily from Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living With High-Risk Technologies* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 78, 93-94.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 98. Perrow's explicitly places "Universities" in the loose coupling/complex interactions quadrant of his typology (p. 97).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

9. Karl Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1976), pp. 11-12; John Meyer and Brian Rowan, "The Structure of Educational Organizations," in Marshall W. Meyer, et al., eds. *Environments and Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1978).

10. See, for example, Meyer and Rowan, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

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decoupling of intention and behavior, means from ends, and plans from action found to be so characteristic of many large university bureaucracies in the US. "Recent studies of universities," James March and his colleagues informed us some time ago, "suggest that such organizations can be viewed for some purposes as collections of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work."[11] So it is today: In such organizations, problems, solutions, decision makers and choice opportunities are loosely coupled, if not actually independent in March and Olsen's view, where "decision making becomes an occasion for exercising problems and solutions more than connecting them, for displaying decision making more than profiting from it, and for exhibiting virtue more than using it."[12] Indeed, those bureaucratic instances of sequential tight coupling, where decision makers deliberately follow procedures designed to lead to the very outcome that actually happened the way decision makers originally intended, may only be possible when there is massive loose coupling in the rest of the bureaucracy that frees up attention and resources needed for this monumental task.[13]

Implications for University Affirmative Action and the Artificial Negativity Thesis

No wonder some minority and female faculty are increasingly critical of the affirmative action programs! Even where they are in charge of affirmative action, program performance seems all but uncoupled from program targets. In the same language March and Olsen describe other bureaucratic reform efforts intended to be comprehensive but ending up ad hoc, affirmative action has in many of these cases "become collections of solutions looking for problems, ideologies looking for soapboxes, pet projects looking for supporters, and people looking for jobs, reputations, or entertainment."[14] In such cases, the right to participate in the affirmative action process becomes as important as the fact of participation; features of the process become the focus of attention rather than its outcome; and senior university officials, who may have worked hard to set up the process, remain relatively indifferent to its implementation as other more urgent items seize their attention.[15]

The problem with applying the artificial negativity thesis to university affirmative action should now be clearer. The thesis predicts regulatory muck and that is what is observed. Like other institutional garbage cans, nothing really ever

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11. Michael Cohen, James March and Johan Olson, "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (March 1972), p. 1.
12. James March and Johan Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), pp. 13, 12. This is an excellent introduction to the "new institutionalism" literature in political science and related fields. The earlier roadmap simile is theirs.
13. I write this as a part-time university administrator. See also Weick, p. 10.
14. March and Olsen, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
15. The terms are from March and Olsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

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gets thrown away in universities; long discarded agendas molder in the darkness, ready to glom onto anything new tossed in the bin. The thesis also predicts protest absorption and that too is observed. As Jeffrey Pfeffer, another organization theorist, reminds us specifically about affirmative action, "If a group makes claims on the organization, one way of handling the claims is to create a subunit to buffer the organization and at the same time provide the group making the demands with the feeling that something has been done, since a subunit has been created."[16] Indeed, such cooptation of protest should be expected where and when universities are tightly coupled to their larger environment.

Unfortunately, nowhere in the university case is there observed the tightly-coupled, linear interaction on the scale the thesis assumes exists between protest absorption and regulatory bloat. Piccone writes of a "bureaucratic logic" to the expansion and penetration of regulation into everyday life. Expansion and penetration, yes, but *logic*? "Organizational responsibility," as a recent review of affirmative action efforts in major universities reminds us, "can be diffuse, often distributed among vice chancellors, deans and department chairs — each with his/her own views about how to achieve consensus, how to accomplish goals."[17] As a result, intentions, means, and plans may be "predictably" decoupled from behavior, ends, and action in large universities and at times even subject to the odd manipulation, but this falls far short of a "logic" of negativity which is ineluctable and unresponsive to contingency and delay.

At this point, several objections have to be addressed. First, one could argue that the negativity thesis is intended to explicate dynamics within capitalist or post-capitalist systems, while the loosely-coupled university just described is really a feudalistic, pre-capitalist artifact. Witness, for example, the commonplace about universities as loosely confederated departmental "fiefdoms." The notion that they are feudal redoubts outside the cash nexus is hardly supportable, however, particularly by those who in the same breath accuse universities of servicing the increasingly demanding administrative state. That being said, how then does the university-as-garbage-can model of March and colleagues fit in with these compelling demands of the wider environment? Is not the process governing the determination of who is an affirmative action candidate as tightly controlled as the certification process over who is or is not a university graduate, as discussed earlier? Even here, though, tightly coupled does not entail linearly interactive as the negativity thesis assumes, and other organization theories predict the same complexly interactive proliferation of rules, procedures and special cases within the university as does the garbage can model.

16. Jeffrey Pfeffer, "The Micropolitics of Organizations," in *Environments and Organizations*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

17. Joyce Bennett Justus, with Sandria Freitag and Leann Parker, *The University of California in the Twenty-First Century: Successful Approaches to Faculty Diversity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 59. The Justus report is based on a review of ideas about successful affirmative action initiatives solicited from fourteen major research universities across the US as well as from each of the University of California campuses.

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This is best illustrated by a recent report on affirmative action prepared at the Berkeley campus of the University of California which states: "University faculty hiring is not absolutely meritocratic, since in almost any appointment, we seek the best candidate in a particular field, sub-field, or specialization in accord with programmatic needs. *Affirmative action considerations constitute a special kind of programmatic need*, since they are important in improving the teaching and research functions of the University. The crucial problem in the implementation of affirmative action is finding the appropriate balance between such programmatic considerations and the traditional standards . . . ."[18] The university's wider environment and multiple constituencies do indeed put a great deal of pressure on it to meet a host of programmatic needs, such as courses in accounting or business law or Japanese art history, even when economists, lawyers and art historians generally perceive — whether rightly or wrongly is another issue — that the best minds do not flock to these subfields but, say, to international finance, constitutional law, or European art history. Even so, the university still seeks to recruit the best for the field, whatever their color, even though the field is itself perceived to be not as prestigious as others.

Some may feel there is nothing wrong in treating the recruitment of women and minorities as a programmatic need for more role models and better facilitators of learning. Others will take the equation of affirmative action to the recruitment of the "best" for the "weakest" fields as a condescension too obvious for comment. What is more pertinent for our purposes is that the existence of specific programmatic needs indicates a more general phenomenon. When the university's wider environment is heterogeneous and changing, as it is today, the organizational response is to create these special programs, units or positions, each with its own procedures or dispensations, to deal with the problematic segments of the environment. As James D. Thompson reminds us, however, "this manner of proceeding becomes unwieldy if the range of possible variations in task-environment behavior is great, for it entails a proliferation of sets of rules. . . ."[19] In short, even where affirmative action has become an integral part of the university's tightly-coupled boundary-spanning with its outside environment, it is not surprising that regulations and deals abound, stunning in their variety and complexity.

From Artificial to Organic and Back Again.

A first reading of Piccone's argument about affirmative action as an example of artificial negativity at work can lead one to ask, "What's the problem? Of

18. Academic Senate, University of California's Berkeley campus, "Report of the Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations, 1988-89," Appendix 1 to the announcement of a special meeting of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate (Berkeley, CA, dated February 26th, 1990), pp. 9-10 (italics added).

19. James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 71.

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course, the seeds of organic negativity are sown in the process." Just as safety devices originally built into high-risk technologies end up increasing the chances of catastrophe, as in Three Mile Island, so too could safety valve absorption of protest lead to uncontrolled conflict later. Perrow has described how efforts to increase the safety of tightly-coupled and complexly interactive technologies often do just the opposite, because no one can predict the unintended interactions of what can follow from the installation of safety devices.[20]

The comparison is instructive. What if affirmative action were rendered tightly coupled within a bureaucratic setting that continued to be complexly interactive? If that occurred (say, as a tightly-coupled "programmatic need" or certification requirement), then protest absorption as an effort to make the bureaucracy "safe" from further outside attack could in the end do just the opposite by making the bureaucracy more vulnerable to ruinous misfortune from within.[21] Those familiar with how disabling mistakes keep cropping up in the strangest places when staff resources are all mobilized for crisis management somewhere else in the bureaucracy can appreciate the organizational dynamic at work. And if anything merits crisis management rather than the ho-hum distraction it typically registers today, it is faculty affirmative action, given the go-slow state of female and minority recruitment in many US universities.

Should this crisis management not be forthcoming, it is worth noting the modest benefits for affirmative action that come with the loosely-coupled, complexly interactive bureaucracy being challenged. First, it is precisely in such a bureaucracy that you would expect to find some "success stories," even in applying affirmative action procedures. In an organized anarchy (the term March and his colleagues use for the university), there is nothing that persistently works against effective affirmative action in all cases and at all times. Like stumbling over a now-valuable antique in the town dump, you can expect somewhere in the university system the temporally-contingent and unexpected conjunction of decision maker, problem, choice and solution to work in a way that pleasantly startles all involved in the hiring of women and minorities. Thus, in a decentralized system like the University of California, it is not surprising that some campuses and departments have periodically done better on faculty affirmative action than others. That is exactly what one would predict for a loosely-coupled, complexly interactive system. Some readers may wish a stronger claim, and evidence does indicate that the conjunction of a department chair (the decision maker) intent on hiring a new faculty member (the choice) specifically for affirmative action purposes (the solution) does have some probability of addressing

20. Perrow, *op. cit.*

21. There are those who say some universities or departments are already at that stage, where affirmative action programs originally set up to contain ethnic and gender agitation and now institutionalized as never-ending programmatic needs have led to the downfall of once-prestigious institutions. Even where such instances can be confirmed, one must not suppose that they reflect, exhaust, or are even representative of the possibilities for organic negativity inside the bureaucracy.

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the problem of recruiting more women and minorities. However, even this conjunction is by no means a straightforward recipe, let alone a necessary or sufficient condition for success, given interactions that are generally more complex and variable than they are linear or formulaic, within the larger university setting.

Even widespread disagreement over how to evaluate affirmative action at the departmental or campus level turns out to be another factor that can work in favor of affirmative action. In a loosely-coupled environment where program evaluation often precedes and is divorced from the actual program outcomes, statistics about program results take on an odd integrity of their own, like sudden ungrammaticalities that surface in a narrative we thought we already knew by heart. Recent criticisms, for example, have been levelled against the student affirmative action efforts at the University of California's Berkeley campus — its administration is alleged to have traded excellence for diversity, academic standards have supposedly been lowered, Asian-Americans, some argue, have been discriminated against, and so on. Readers might not be familiar with the specifics, but they doubtless know the general storyline and narrative of declining educational standards around the U.S. Statistics, however, keep clouding the issue: "One indicator that the far-ranging diversification of the [Berkeley campus] student body that has taken place in the past decade has *not* been at the expense of conventional academic standards is the fact that the percentage of new freshmen with combined SATs less than or equal to 1000 declined from 24.8 percent in 1978 to 20.5 percent in 1987. . . . During the same years, the proportion of freshmen with very high SATs (defined as 1400 or more) more than doubled, from 4.2 to 11.0 percent. . . . Moreover, the average combined SATs (verbal and math) during this period of rapid change in the racial/ethnic composition of the student body rose from 1130 in 1981 to 1185 in 1988 . . ."[22] or "Universitywide graduation rates [for University of California campuses] compare quite favorably with both public and private institutions. Whereas the four- and five-year graduation rates of comparable public institutions are 30% and 42% respectively, the parallel Universitywide rates are 31% and 59%. Although private institutions graduate a larger proportion of students in four years (54%), the Universitywide five-year rate is equal to that of private institutions. Universitywide five-year graduation rates for Asians, Blacks, and Chicanos/Latinos exceed, and in some instances are nearly double, those of comparable public institutions . . ."[23] Fortunately, there are still those whose suspicions are roused by

22. Academic Senate, University of California's Berkeley campus, *Freshman Admissions at Berkeley: A Policy for the 1990s and Beyond*, a report by the Committee on Admissions and Enrollment (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 19-20. The extent of diversification can be gauged by the fact that the proportion of minorities (Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, and Filipinos) in the Berkeley campus fall freshman class rose from 15.3% in 1981 to 36.6% in 1988, during which time the proportion of whites declined from 57.9% to 37%, accompanied as well by a small drop in the proportion of non-Filipino Asians from 22.7% to 20.8% (p. 19).

23. University of California, Office of the President, "Report on the University of

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the sheer ease with which one or two affirmative action horror stories are universalized into the narrative of pervasive decline across all universities.

Where does all this leave faculty affirmative action? We are a long way from having demonstrated that this issue is truly intractable, as Piccone would have it. Where affirmative action programs are loosely coupled, tolerance of affirmative action might well increase within the university, if simply because expected system failures and unpredictable local successes have to coexist there. Where affirmative action programs are tightly coupled, then tolerance of affirmative action could also increase within the university, if only for the reason that many women and minorities, both at the graduate student and faculty levels, will now be needed to cover the unexpectedly high turnover and burnout in front-line affirmative action faculty. Finally, more speculative but less happily, tolerance of affirmative action might well increase within the university to the extent that doing so enables both the university *and* its wider environment to protect their respective core values from becoming increasingly diluted.[24] Call this repressive tolerance, if you like, but it will not be the first time that people have tried to render a seemingly intractable policy problem into a less serious administrative one, if given half the chance.

Karl Mannheim is reported to have said that bureaucracy is the type of organization which renders all policy issues into administrative problems. The question of whether or not such policy issues can be resolved outside the framework of bureaucracy takes us back, finally, to the artificial negativity issue. Where does all of this leave the thesis? Relatively unscathed, as far as I can determine. It satisfactorily predicts what goes in and what comes out, and as for what happens in between . . . well, two out of three is not bad when it comes to high theory. The thesis can also take support in the fact that other, more middle-range conceptual frameworks in the organization literature predict similar phenomena. What the thesis gets wrong, however, does matter. Clearly, if university affirmative action is any indication, it is by no means demonstrated that organic negativity cannot follow artificial negativity *inside* bureaucracy. It depends on the notion of bureaucracy deployed and the cases examined, both of which are more variegated than appears to have been assumed in the past.

California Undergraduate Student Affirmative Action Programs," a paper prepared for the members of the UC Special Committee on Affirmative Action Policies (Berkeley: December 14th, 1989), p.10.

24. Cf. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, Complete Revised English Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 191: "It may be supposed that the more loosely society is integrated, the greater is the permitted variation, but what happens here [in the Indian caste system] is more radical. In the hierarchical scheme a group's acknowledged differentness whereby it is contrasted with other groups becomes the very principle whereby it is integrated into society. If you eat beef, you must accept being classed among the Untouchables, and on this condition your practice will be tolerated." If you are female or a Latino, you must perforce be part of Women or Chicano Studies, and it is on this condition you are tolerated . . .

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Artificial Negativity as a Bureaucratic Tool? Reply to Roe

Paul Piccone

Roe closes his half-hearted defense of affirmative action bureaucracies with a quote from Mannheim to the effect that "bureaucracy is the type of organization which renders all policy issues into administrative problems." This must be his way of apologizing for his own reduction of the artificial negativity analysis of the changing character of advanced capitalism during its oligopolistic phase, i.e., following the New Deal/Welfare state reorganization of the socio-economic system between the early 1930s and the mid-1960s, to merely another relatively trivial elaboration of internal bureaucratic dynamics. Although an analysis of affirmative action bureaucracies as artificial negativity may help explain their dismal record of increasingly generating perplexing counterfinalities (in ways, however, quite different than Roe), such an analysis can ultimately make sense only as part of a broader account of the particular historically-specific conditions within which these affirmative action bureaucracies function. By analyzing the dynamics of these bureaucracies in terms of an uncritically accepted Left-liberal interpretation of affirmative action policies, Roe constructs a subtle but unconvincing apology for the unavoidable bureaucratic mishandling of a set of misguided policies which, in principle, could never have been effectively implemented. Thus, in order to understand the reasons for this bureaucratic failure, which Roe repackages as at least a partial success, it is necessary to clarify why, as *artificial negativity*, affirmative action policies could not possibly succeed and, in the process of failing, why they generate counterproductive results even more serious than the problems they were meant to solve. In order to do so, however, it is necessary to reiterate how the artificial negativity analysis was never devised merely as a rationalizing mechanism for tendentially sluggish bureaucracies. As a reformulation of the social dynamics of advanced industrial societies and, in the wake of the Left's collapse, it was meant, rather, to prefigure what sort of politics may be potentially emancipatory within the present context.

Originally, the artificial negativity analysis was meant as a corrective to

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Adorno's and Marcuse's respective accounts of the totally administered and one-dimensional society. Neither account ever corresponded to any *actual* society and, even as *elaborations of predominant tendencies*, had already been displaced by new dynamics by the time they were finally fully formulated. By the late 1960s, the state reorganization of the socio-economic system in the wake of the Great Depression had proven increasingly counterproductive. One of the main reasons for this was the gradual erosion of that organic negativity hitherto spontaneously generated under conditions of *laissez-faire* capitalism which, translated into internal control mechanisms, had rationalized the system and made it relatively self-correcting before its internal logic of growing concentration and centralization brought about the Great Depression. The problem with the original Frankfurt School analysis was that, because of its inability to find an alternative agency of social change for the now integrated and therefore politically deactivated working class, and lacking a more viable theory of subjectivity than the one derivable from even a philosophically sophisticated reading of Marx's and Freud's texts, it ended up misunderstanding the inherently self-destabilizing dynamics of advanced capitalism and reifying them into a terminally stable system impervious to any further qualitative changes. In spite of Marcuse's desperate efforts to find negativity in mythical "outsiders" or in a Third World he never really knew, or Adorno's attempts to deploy art as the last bastion of potential resistance and emancipation, Critical Theory could only come up with an analysis projecting a luxurious totalitarianism well-managed not by wooden dictators of pre-WWII vintage but by the narcotic effects of opulence, superficiality and meaninglessness.

Things, however, unfolded in a rather different way. As a result of the bureaucratic integration or coordination of practically all institutions within a rapidly fading "federal" system, the one-dimensional or totally administered society did tend to become as statist as its communist or Nazi nemesis — precisely as Critical Theory had projected. But it also became prone to the same internal dysfunctions that, along with the overwhelming majority of their contemporaries, critical theorists did not foresee — problems which necessitated system-generated attempts to reverse those centralizing tendencies hitherto believed irresistible.[1] With the gradual erosion of that organic negativity

1. This is structurally the same phenomenon which, because of its much greater magnitude, has doomed the USSR to irreversible disintegration. To the extent that, unlike the US, the USSR has consciously sought to destroy all particularity that could not be readily subordinated to the Party's particular vision of Brave New World, when the growing rationality crisis could no longer be contained at the end of the Brezhnev era, there was not enough unintegrated otherness to be deployed as artificial negativity to rationalize the system. Predicated on its alleged superior ability to deliver prosperity *and* equality, state legitimacy could not be restored by instrumentalizing residual ethnic, nationalist or religious particularity without preliminarily passing through the purgatory of social disintegration. After seventy years of super-legality in the Soviet Union, no new government, party or bureaucracy even remotely related to the existing one could possibly muster sufficient social trust to reform the system. Since the only

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spontaneously generated within a pre-New Deal society constituted by a plurality of relatively independent institutions and autonomous citizens, the system lost one of its most important internal regulatory mechanisms and began to stumble into a series of economic, ecological, motivational and systemic crises which could no longer be solved or managed by standard statist remedies: the deployment of more bureaucracy and regulation. These mechanisms, which after the inception of WWII had succeeded in pulling the system out of the Depression, could function effectively only as long as the societal otherness they regulated was not irreversibly eroded and could generate the kind of opposition whose watchdog role indirectly tended to guarantee the rationality of the whole. By the 1960s the administrative penetration of everyday life had homogenized or eradicated all opposition and resistance in such a way that the latter no longer regulated a system growing increasingly irrational. This explains the US government's inability to reevaluate geopolitical realities following the Sino-Soviet split (which resulted in the Vietnam fiasco), the losing of the war on poverty, the explosion of racial riots in the cities, and a whole series of other systemic failures.

This predicament did not pass entirely unnoticed within those executive circles entrusted with the stability and growth of the system as a whole, which proceeded to deal with the problem in the only way they knew: by *administratively* attempting to constitute that negativity needed by the system as a control mechanism for a bureaucratic apparatus mired in growing internal involution. The funding by a rapidly fading Great Society of its opposition and critics was neither the ultimate bureaucratic lunacy it seemed to a relatively naive Left now increasingly gravitating towards the government payroll, nor a real solution from the viewpoint of the system. To the extent that this government-sponsored negativity was *artificially created*, it eventually fell victim to the very bureaucratic dynamics it was meant to regulate, thus extending rather than challenging (and thereby indirectly rationalizing) the logic of the system. Thus, instead of providing new viable internal control mechanisms, it ended up creating another generation of bureaucrats within counter-bureaucratic bureaucracies.

Without inquiring here into alternative ways to encourage the spontaneous generation of organic negativity within residual or new communities by providing protection against the debilitating penetration of the bureaucratic apparatus under the pretenses of enforcing individual rights, protecting community

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remaining sources of legitimation are *particularistic*, any relegitimation of the system as a precondition for meaningful reforms presupposes also a relegitimation of particularistic state forms and, therefore, a preliminary disintegration of the whole. See my "Paradoxes of *Perestroika*" in *Telos* 84 (Summer 1990), pp. 3-32. Although different modes of super-legality have eroded legality and social trust in the US as well, it has been nowhere close to the level and magnitude in the USSR. Consequently, not only does the system retain considerable legitimacy, but its recuperative capabilities remain relatively strong. See Paul Piccone and G. L. Ulmen, "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe" in *Telos* 83 (Spring 1990), pp. 3-34.

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members, or providing entitlements, it is clear that, although the analysis may be extended to particular bureaucratic organizations (in the trivial sense that whistle-blowers are rationalizing agents flagging down inefficiency, corruption and dysfunctions in general), it is primarily concerned with *systems*. It can be applied to particular organizations, but only by assuming as fundamentally sound the context within which these organizations function. Since the desirability and efficacy of affirmative action policies is far from apodictically established, Roe's limited sectoral account ends up Taylorizing the artificial negativity analysis of these issues. From a heuristic device primarily concerned with broad systemic dysfunctions, the artificial negativity analysis turns into merely an organizational device concerned with productivity and efficiency within a bureaucratic apparatus that already uncritically assumes as settled what should be still under scrutiny. Thus, for Roe, whether affirmative action can in fact bring about a more just and egalitarian society or redress historical injustices, which is presupposed by almost all affirmative action advocates, is no longer a matter open to discussion within the instrumental rationality of an organization concerned purely with achieving arbitrarily-set quotas.

Caught in this bureaucratic *petitio principii* which forces him to defend what from the viewpoint of a bureaucrat he can no longer question, Roe uses the artificial negativity analysis as a map, as it calls it, to trace how a seemingly self-stultifying bureaucratic apparatus manages nonetheless to generate organic negativity in the very process of producing the otherwise projected counter-productive results. From a normative theory of social dynamics, artificial negativity is thereby degraded to a *neutral* technical device useful to achieve any externally-posited objective. Thus, for Roe, there can no longer be anything normatively ambivalent about affirmative action. It all boils down to determining the best possible mode of internal organization to achieve whatever objectives have been externally determined. As such, it is all a matter of substituting what looks suspiciously like a hip "California" model of bureaucracy — what he describes as "loosely connected and complexly interactive" — developed by laid-back organization theorists for the (by now allegedly obsolete) austere "Prussian" version — "tightly-coupled and linearly interactive" — described by Weber and parroted by certified sociologists ever since. Bottom line: notwithstanding all the opportunism, duplicity and counterproductivity normally associated with affirmative action bureaucracies, they can ultimately manage, somehow, to fulfill at least some of the desired objectives. Unfortunately, however, even if these minimalist results did contribute to the solution of the problems for which they were intended, which on closer examination turns out not to be the case, they cannot be reasonably credited to Roe's California-style bureaucracies but, in terms of the very arguments he develops, they turn out to be a function of the extent to which these "new and improved" bureaucracies no longer operate as *bona fide* bureaucracies.

As a precondition to an inquiry into the porosity of Roe's account, however, it is necessary to sketch what an artificial negativity analysis of affirmative action

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policies would be — something that Roe haphazardly extrapolates from other discussions having only tangential bearing on this particular problem. Before doing this, however, it is useful to briefly summarize the original arguments justifying the deployment of affirmative action. The *kind* of questionable affirmative action policy grudgingly accepted by the American polity as constitutionally viable and politically desirable must be sharply differentiated from what the Left-liberal academic establishment and the various affirmative action bureaucracies have come to understand this policy to mean. This is essential, because practically all affirmative action bureaucrats (along with Roe) defend the implementation of *what they interpret* to be affirmative action policies. Not only does the latter turn out to be at odds with what was originally legislated but: 1) it is tendentially unconstitutional in *de facto* assuming quotas predicated on race, gender, national origin, etc.; 2) it is politically counterproductive for the alleged beneficiaries of such policies; and 3) it is ultimately part of the hidden agenda of the New Class, resulting in new and more sophisticated forms of social domination. As such, it has very little to do with historical Left ideals concerning egaliterianism, democratic enfranchisement of hitherto illegally excluded and marginalized minorities or, more generally, social justice *sic et nunc*. It is, unfortunately, all too neatly in step with the Left's historical record of appealing to unfulfilled or altogether ignored traditional Western values to undermine vital structures in the lifeworld and thereby pave the way for the introduction of new and more pervasive modes of domination. By deploying what Carl Schmitt called "super-legality," i.e., the overprivileging of certain values suddenly considered overpowering (such as the overcoming of racism and sexism) to warrant overriding existing forms of legality,[2] the Left has helped precipitate a social crisis even more debilitating than the one it originally sought to redress.

The Subversion of Affirmative Action Objectives

Affirmative action was and remains, in the more careful definitions of its advocates, different from a *prima facie* unconstitutional quota system conflicting with fundamental individual rights such as equality before the law. In view of the long history of illegal discrimination on the basis of race, gender, etc., all it claimed to mandate was that, in situations in which there are equally qualified candidates available for a given position, i.e., situations in which, by default, informal subjective criteria become decisive, candidates belonging to a particularly designated minority or group should be preferred. It was never intended, nor could it possibly constitute, compensation for past injustices, since only the particular victims of such injustices can claim redress, and then only from those responsible for the given deed. The rejection of transgenerational guilt on the ground that only *individual* subjects can be moral agents is a

2. For an elaboration of the implications of "super-legality," see "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe: Four Exchanges," in *Telos* 86 (Fall 1990), pp. 94-99.

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fundamental assumption not only of the the US Constitution but of all modern societies (even corporate responsibility is predicated on the stipulation that corporations are to be treated as legal subjects).

This minimalist, but constitutionally acceptable, definition of affirmative action was presumably meant to correct whatever residual racist prejudices may have lingered in those in positions of power, consciously or unconsciously resulting in the continued preferential treatment of WASP and WASP-like male candidates to the detriment of others equally qualified belonging to groups traditionally discriminated against. From the very beginning, however, this rigorous legal definition of affirmative action fell victim to a bureaucratic logic inherently unable to deal effectively with anything falling outside formal rationality. Since it is impossible to scientifically quantify the abilities of candidates so as to allow for objectively impeccable and thereby formally rational decisions about hiring, promotions, admissions, etc., solely on the basis of actual but notoriously vague and incommensurable qualifications, the focus gradually shifted from easily manipulable and otherwise elusive procedures to objectively ascertainable results. Thus lack of proportional minority representation gradually came to be considered *de facto* evidence of procedural unfairness. Consequently, any academic department whose demographic composition did not closely reflect the national average, no matter what the real reasons, became subject to the most intense administrative pressure to remedy a situation now deemed intolerably pathological.[3]

With the policing of affirmative action compliance entrusted to specially created affirmative action bureaucracies, the Left-liberal/bureaucratic interpretation of affirmative action legislation *as a means to collectively redress historical injustices* and to homogenize all social domains in terms of the "proper" ethnic, gender or racial composition readily displaced the vague, ineffective and practically unenforceable originally-mandated version. If it is impossible to establish whether all candidates are evaluated fairly in a context where the relevant criteria and what weight they ought to have is never entirely clear, it is not altogether unreasonable and, at any rate, much better suited to bureaucratic formalism, to simply determine what percentages of a given demographic sample ought to belong to specific ethnic, racial or gender groups, and enforce compliance with the established figures. After all, if it is now inadmissible *on principle* not only that, *legally*, race, gender, ethnic origin, religion etc. should have no role in formal evaluations, but that *in fact* they have nothing to do with abilities, motivations or expectations, then the lack of proportional representation of these various categories throughout society can only signal past or present foul play within the particular institutions in question. This blatant deployment of what Adorno called identity logic, whereby the abstract concept substitutes for concrete reality, following the self-destructive logic of

3. See Fred Siegel, "The Cult of Multiculturalism," in *The New Republic* (February 18, 1991), pp. 34-40.

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commodity fetishism, ends up pervading not only the socio-economic system but also Left-liberal ideology and bureaucratic thinking, generating a culture of general guilt about past injustices and a compulsive desire to redress them at all costs — even if such a redemption is no longer possible without perpetrating *new* injustices by rewarding members of a group who had not been *personally* victims, at the expense of members of some other group who had not been *personally* the culprits.

Worse yet, to the extent that these considerations shortcircuit the traditional meritocratic system (which, notwithstanding whatever abuses it may have facilitated or tolerated, remains the only legitimate *modus operandi* in matters of hiring, admissions, promotions, etc.) they overemphasize gender, racial and ethnic differences, and become obstacles to the constitution of new communities based on common interests, free interaction and shared expectations. Thus they subvert the emancipatory objectives of affirmative action legislation. Far from becoming increasingly insignificant attributes, ethnic, racial and gender differences now become *essential* for employment, promotions, etc., and they are thereby reinvented, reinforced and reified. Furthermore, suspicions that the reason proportional representation does not obtain in certain culture-related occupations is a function of what *kind* of culture is produced and reproduced, result in conflicts concerning the character of that culture and, eventually in challenges to the very values embedded in the US Constitution, the upholding of which originally warranted the deployment of affirmative action legislation. The result is not only multicultural and postmodern chaos, but a new form of racism predicated on resentment, increased social inequality (because of the consequent racial polarization and therefore a narrowing of the field of opportunities), growing intolerance of racial or ethnic differences now deemed decisive, and a gradual delegitimation of those fundamental universal values underpinning American society, now indicted as particularistic Eurocentric residues. No longer bound by any collectively shared values, society tends to disintegrate into a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes* where order can be eventually restored only by authoritarian means anathema to any democratic system.

Affirmative Action as Artificial Negativity

The reason affirmative action fails to bring about either a more egalitarian or a more democratic society is not because Prussian-style bureaucracies always necessarily generate counterproductive results, as Roe seems to suggest, but because, to put it crudely, racial problems and the like have increasingly become ideological fig-leaves for more pervasive problems resulting from class domination, social inequality and traditional capitalist relations. Thus affirmative action legislation is expected to resolve problems no bureaucracy can possibly tackle without undertaking major projects of social reorganization falling well beyond its competence and scope. By focusing on racism and sexism as the *fons et origo malorum* and by identifying the state as *the* agency able to eradicate them,

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Left-liberal ideology deemphasizes or altogether occludes other more decisive economic problems and turns into an apology for intensified New Class domination. Only this class, by deploying its knowledge-power through the state, is now deemed sufficiently competent to social-engineer a racist and sexist society out of its bigotry, while in fact legitimating its already considerable privileges and reinforcing rather than eliminating the irrationalities of the *status quo*.

Instead of eliminating social inequalities which, for various deeply-rooted but historically *contingent* reasons, have developed along race and gender lines, Left-liberal ideology merely seeks their proper proportional redistribution. Misery and suffering, however, do not thereby cease to be less objectionable. Instead, they become more *legitimate* and therefore less of a threat to existing relations of domination. In this respect, the Left critique has gradually been displaced by its liberal counterpart and, along with it, turned into a minimalist reformist strategy seeking to stabilize rather than to eliminate existing social pathologies. In step with the Reagan-era strategy on increasing economic inequality under the pretense of encouraging investments and growth, affirmative action policies relegitimate the existing social stratification by enforcing proportional representation in the various social strata, along set race and gender lines. Worse yet, this redistribution can only be carried out, as already indicated, by privileging members of a previously excluded group who had not necessarily been *personally* wronged, by discriminating against members of the majority who are not *personally* guilty of any of the discriminatory crimes. The result is growing inter-racial resentment against what is now perceived as a new form of bureaucratically-sponsored injustice.

From his bureaucratic vantage point, Roe cannot deal with these issues without reducing them to administrative problems of efficiency. Thus all he can do is to assume proportional representation to be itself democratic and egalitarian and defend his California-style bureaucracy as the most effective and efficient means to achieve it. But proportional representation is vaguely egalitarian and democratic only on a *collective* level; i.e., it does little to eliminate inequality among *individuals*. There is no constitutionally or philosophically defensible basis for the kind of group rights Roe privileges at the expense of constitutionally guaranteed individual rights, which are explicitly protected precisely against these collectivist encroachments. Furthermore, in order to operationalize affirmative action in terms of his collectively defined egalitarianism, Roe condones the most dubious pop-psychological pedagogical arguments: the function of role models as essential to facilitate learning. From a bureaucratic perspective, Roe does not question the *justification* for whatever objectives he is entrusted to achieve, unless these "programmatic needs," as he calls them, become embroiled in boundary-spanning morasses generating contradictory requirements and irresolvable conflicts. This is where California-style bureaucracies come in. Their chaotic internal structure (loose coupling) is best suited to deal with a variety of often contradictory agendas (complex interaction). But this is an evasion of the responsibility to establish whether specific means can actually

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achieve the specific ends for which they are meant. Thus Roe cannot uncritically accept as a "programmatic need" the recruitment of "role models" to "facilitate learning" if there is no necessary connection between the two and, furthermore, role model pedagogy encourages precisely the opposite by actually *preventing* learning.

Role Model Ideology as New Class Social Psychology

By unwarrantedly overgeneralizing the barely tenable commonsensical psychoanalytic assumption that children learn by internalizing and mimicking parental or adult roles, "role model" psychology relegates all learning to pre-adolescent modes precluding more rational, universal and objective forms that take place with the achievement of maturity. The internalization of "role models" as a necessary phase in ego development can take place only before adolescence (or, for object-relation psychologists, as early as the preoedipal phase). If this internalization does not take place, whether in relation to the father, the mother or peers, the result is a psychological dysfunction conducive to the "authoritarian personality" or to a diffusion of internalized authority ruling out an independent personality capable of autonomous judgements — hence a potential prey of consumerism, the culture industry and manipulation in general. Thus reliance on role models, even as early as adolescence, is already a pathological condition signaling subindividuality. This predicament is not all that different from what the Frankfurt School's collective study on *Authorität und Familie* identified as a pathological form of ego development which created the social-psychological preconditions for German working class support of Nazism and widespread conformism in the US. In both the Frankfurt School analysis of the sources of working class authoritarianism and in "role model" pedagogy individual development is stunted. In the first case, the absence of the father (or the mother[4]) as the authority figure whose role is to be internalized as a precondition for the development of a healthy ego leads to its substitution by a diffused alternative impossible to internalize: the *Fürher*, the state and the bureaucracy. The result is a permanent relation of dependence which freezes individuality at a pre-adolescent phase of development. In the second case, internalization is also assumed to have been stunted, and

4. See Jessica Benjamin, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology," in *Telos* 32 (Summer, 1977), pp. 42-64. Benjamin is right in her critique of the Frankfurt School account of social psychology as unwarrantedly patrocentric, and in pushing back ego formation to much earlier preoedipal phases where relation with the mother is conducive to the development of mutuality rather than the monadic individuality presupposed by Freud and the Freudians. It does not follow from this, however, that mother-monopolized child-rearing generates gender polarization as the source of patriarchy and subsequently of all social domination —something she suggests in *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988). What is significant here is that a pathological mode of early socialization cannot be bureaucratically rectified after adolescence by association with abstract "role models" pretending to substitute for missing familial or community structures.

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the missing familial authority figure is bureaucratically provided by the "role models" whose only qualification is racial or gender similarity. The result is a *particularization* of knowledge whereby consciousness remains fixated at a level of immediacy and is unable to attain a broader universalistic level of maturity and adult individuality.

Unless children eventually grow out of that phase by means of internalization or whatever and, in the process of becoming adults, begin to differentiate ideas and knowledge in general from their mode of presentation and delivery — something that happens normally through exposure to a heterogeneity of experiences transcending the immediate familial or community context — they remain caught in a conformist immaturity ruling out the kind of individuality and autonomy attainable only by eventually breaking with internalized authority figures. Since it is impossible for children in working class families analyzed by Critical Theory in the 1930s, or the minority families targeted by civil rights legislation today, to internalize the role of the substitute authority figure outside the familial framework, be it the *Führer*, the bureaucracy, or the new "role models" now provided by affirmative action bureaucracies, they internalize only a pathological relation to authority or a particularistic relation to knowledge, and end up psychologically handicapped or permanently entrapped in precisely the paternalistic framework they are allegedly being encouraged to escape. To bureaucratically feed the victims of racism and past discrimination "role models" as social-psychological medicine is a form of paternalist poison which perpetuates cognitive immaturity and a pathological relation of overdependance on a now diffused authority. Far from facilitating learning, dependence on "role models" beyond early adolescence prevents students from growing into responsible citizens able to sustain a mode of citizenship conducive to a truly egalitarian and democratic society.

Unwittingly, under the pretense of deploying affirmative action to facilitate learning (i.e., access to domains and ideas broader than what is immediately given), "role model" advocates reinforce rather than eliminate *exclusively* particularistic and thereby socially-handicapped identities, thus extending precisely the sort of plantation mentality which relegates socialization and education solely to the mechanical reproduction of existing social relations. It is impossible for individuals today to function effectively in the modern world without a *dual* identity simultaneously rooted both in the immediacy of community and familial particularity and in the universality of public culture. Role model learning makes sense only within a familial context and during pre-adolescent phases of personal development. To extend it to maturity, after individuals have already become fully immersed in the public domain, results in culturally crippled individuals unable to function effectively within a public culture which has not already been ethnocentrically reduced to its particularistic otherness.

The problem with minorities lays elsewhere. To the extent that they are disproportionately mired in a poverty culture which, unlike that of most recent

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immigrants from traditional societies, has been thoroughly penetrated by the culture industry, they lack strong familial or residual community structures conducive to the automatic constitution of pre-adolescent particularistic identities as preconditions for the sort of public universal identity whose *Bildung* is the function of higher education. No bureaucrat or "role model" can substitute for those structures and facilitate the achievement of a personal maturity which, when all is said and done, remains a fundamentally *personal* achievement heavily dependent on pre-adolescent forms of socialization. When, in the effort to compensate for this cultural handicap, affirmative action bureaucracies redesign education on the basis of "role model" pedagogical strategies, they end up substituting rather than complementing a remedial particularistic identity for its public universalist counterpart. As a result, instead of successfully integrating minority students into the broader public culture, they handicap them into exclusively particularistic identities from whose perspective its complementary universal public version itself appears as an alien *alternative* culture. Checkmated out of public discourse by their terminally exclusive particularistic identities, the products of affirmative action education end up, at best, reproducing at an even higher adversarial pitch the social divisions that education was meant to help eradicate.

"Role model" pedagogy, however, is a career bonanza for otherwise relatively mediocre New Class members of particular minority groups, the demand for whose services is thereby bureaucratically inflated (which helps explain its popularity among marginal minority academics) while having devastating consequences for those it is supposedly meant to help. In presupposing a collective cultural handicap (not necessarily or very often the case) for the overwhelming majority of street-wise minority students, affirmative action programs deal with them paternalistically as if they had all been permanently relegated to pre-adolescent levels of individual development. Thus "role model" advocates sponsor the particularization of universalistic identities and thereby end up socializing students into sharply segregated intellectual ghettoes where they can succeed only by indefinitely perpetuating the kind of social barriers affirmative action was meant to remove. The zoo-keeper mentality Gouldner ascribed to sociologists applies all the more aptly to affirmative action and multicultural bureaucrats.[5] The result, however, is a freezing rather than an intensification of emancipatory social change.

Postmodern Bureaucracies or Chaos?

Even if Roe's apology for affirmative action bureaucracies had not been invalidated by the fact that his Left-liberal interpretation of affirmative action legislation rules out the possibility of achieving the stated goals and actually worsens an already pathological social predicament, it would still have to be

5 Alvin Gouldner, *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 37ff.

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dismissed as a clever, self-serving ploy to legitimate standard bureaucratic interests. That he can even attempt such a maneuver with a reasonable chance of getting away with it is an indication of the lack of awareness of the inner dynamics of modern bureaucracies. Despite the fact that these institutions have become the predominant form of social organization, not only in government but also in corporations, churches, political groups etc., they remain mysterious entities, both to the public as well as to professionals entrusted with studying them (but whose understanding of their nature is suspiciously consistent with their particular interests as *bureaucrats* in particular and New Class ideologists in general). To the public, bureaucracies are both frightening agencies of domination meant to achieve objectives defined in remote and inaccessible places such as legislatures, stockholders' meetings, Board of Regents, Politburos, etc., as well as paternalistic entities providing services and fulfilling entitlements often invented by the bureaucrats themselves. Thus bureaucratic formalism, originally meant to guarantee rationality, efficiency and procedural fairness, often translates into aloofness, unwieldiness and impenetrability or, at best, into a debilitating paternalism whose relations of dependence cretinizes and deindividualizes the alleged beneficiaries into passive, manipulable clients.

To professionals like Roe, the mythical Weberian account of Prussian-style bureaucracies translates into the classical Chaplinesque caricature of *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator*, whose performance is normally counterproductive, disruptive and deserving all the chastisement it usually receives. Without carefully spelling out exactly the reasons for this predicament, Roe dismisses Weber's model of bureaucracy as horse-and-buggy stuff. Allegedly, organization theory has long since refined analytically distinct notions of bureaucracy which succeed in explaining why some bureaucracies do in fact work rather well while others fail. Accordingly, unlike their better known, gloom-and-doom Prussian counterparts, the "tightly-coupled and linearly-interactive" variety, "loosely-coupled and complexly-interactive" post-modern California-style bureaucracies do not succumb to the usual fate of inefficiency, redundancy, waste, irrationality, etc., and perform as well as anyone can reasonably expect: most of the time they get things done relatively well.

According to Roe's argument, this happens only because postmodern California-style bureaucracies do not really function in the same way as their Prussian-style counterparts. They no longer adhere to formal rationality whereby the best means are deployed to achieve pre-given ends in the most efficient possible way, since the ends have become contradictory and the effectiveness of means is questionable. Instead, the goals are pre-set, but *how* they are achieved takes a variety of informal, often contradictory forms entirely independent of traditional formal rationality. While this can be taken as an accurate depiction of how many of today's bureaucracies manage to function under problematic conditions, it is not an altogether new discovery by organization theory.[6] More

6. Already in his doctoral dissertation, subsequently published as *Patterns of Industrial*

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importantly, by overemphasizing manifest internal *Realpolitik*, Roe occludes a much more significant feature of bureaucratic life. A bureaucracy's *manifest* objectives often clash with the bureaucrats' *latent* particular goals (such as the functionaries' interests in more power, less responsibility, higher status, less work, better pay, shorter hours, job security, no accountability, etc.,). In this sense, bureaucratic strategies always have a double agenda. In case of irreconcilable conflicts, if control and accounting mechanisms are sufficiently slack (as in the case of Roe's California-style bureaucracy), it is the organization's interests which tend to be subordinated to *latent* internal imperatives. That most bureaucracies usually do not seem to work, therefore, is not necessarily due to some mysterious and inherently evil characteristic of Prussian-style bureaucracies, but may be related to the fact that the pursuit of the *latent* internal agenda tends to shortcircuit the fulfillment of the *manifest* one. This pursuit of *latent* objectives is immensely easier if the bureaucrats succeed in de-Prussianizing and/or Californianizing their particular bureaucracies. Thus, even if Roe's apology had been more credible, it would still have had to be taken with a ton of salt, coming as it does from an active party in the perennial struggle between the external polity defining the bureaucracy's *manifest* objectives and bureaucrats attempting to redefine them in accordance with their *latent* agenda.

It should not take massive research by new bureaucratic fictions such as "organization theory" to figure out why affirmative action bureaucracies tend to lean irresistibly in the post-modern Califirnia direction. The public's and the legislature's lack of clarity concerning what precisely constitutes affirmative action, the faculty's not entirely mistaken perception of it as a not-so-subtle way to subvert meritocracy, and the affirmative action bureaucrat's own inability to operationalize it without turning it into a crude quota system, all contribute to an organizational chaos where looseness and informal networks become functional in achieving whatever "positive" results are actually achieved. To turn this mess into a virtue, however, should not be glorified as anything more than a self-serving bureaucratic maneuver to legitimate standard bureaucratic practices of resisting accountability, to win more free play within the organization and, generally, to advance personal at the expense of organizational interests.

Bureaucracy (New York: The Free Press, 1954), Gouldner discussed the "indulgent model" of bureaucracy as a mode of adaptation to irrational conditions or as an effective way to informally negotiate conflicts within an organization and, thereby, obtain better results than would have been the case within Prussian-style bureaucracies. Unlike Roe, however, Gouldner never overlooked the *class dimension* in his analysis of various forms of bureaucracy and, as a result, avoids apologetic traps. Even in Talcott Parsons' work, concerned primarily with forms of authority within bureaucracies, there is a subdivision of Weber's general model bureaucracy into the legal and the rational type — the latter already exhibiting all the caracteristics of Roe's California-style bureaucracy. See Talcott Parsons ed., *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 58-60n.

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The bureaucratic and Left-liberal interpretations of the objectives of affirmative action policies cannot possibly be realized within the present context by a simple Californification of affirmative action bureaucracies. If some proportional representation is actually achieved and some minority students who would not otherwise make it through the system manage to do so,[7] it is sheer accident. The new California-style bureaucracies Roe describes are actually chaotic organizations with no viable means seeking to achieve fundamentally contradictory goals, rather than bureaucracies in any traditional sense. The real problems have to do with accountability, control and coherence of objectives, as well as adequate resources to do the job properly. When any of these elements fails, as turns out to be often the case, the organization slides into an anarchy within which *any* positive results tend to appear as the secular equivalent of miracles. In this sense, the issue is one of how to rationalize "tightly-coupled and linearly interactive" Prussian bureaucracies, while at the same time leaving sufficient discretionary space to cover unforeseeable situations subject, however, to appropriate review to guarantee against arbitrariness in the discretionary decisions. To the extent that formal rationality functions only within a context in which objectives are unproblematic, means are effective, and efficiency is guaranteed by autonomous entities able to control particular bureaucracies, the question of bureaucratic rationality is never merely a *bureaucratic* matter of internal organization, but one of the general context within which bureaucracies operate. The artificial negativity analysis of advanced industrial societies is not predicated on a blank condemnation of bureaucracies *sic et nunc*, but on the irrationality of the context within which bureaucracies function. The problem is primarily political rather than merely organizational.

7. This is not the place to undertake a careful reinterpretation of the aggregation of the questionable statistics Roe provides to document a growing graduating rate in the University of California at Berkeley. To the extent that they do not separate students according to affirmative action blacks, whites, and other minority groups subject to reverse discrimination, such as Asian-Americans, they are useless. It may well be that the rise in the graduating rate of whites, Asian-Americans and other non-affirmative action students, whose admission requirements have been raised significantly as a result of a shrinking of available slots resulting from the admission of a large number of underqualified affirmative action students, effectively compensates for a dismal graduating rate in the latter group.

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Reinhard Bendix (1916-1991)

Guenther Roth

After the recent deaths of Hans Speier and Felix Gilbert at age eighty-five, the number of persons is ever growing smaller who witnessed Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 and escaped to lead productive lives, giving and taking, in an adoptive country. On February 28 Reinhard Bendix died in Berkeley, three days after celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday with friends and colleagues. He was done neither with writing nor with teaching. Stricken by a final heart attack, he collapsed into the arms of his seminar students — an ideal end for a scholar who took "science as a vocation" so seriously. Until the end he struggled how best to explain social reality and his own scholarly approach to students who seemed to remain forever young, while advancing age removed him more and more from their immediate life experience. As a student of ideology and utopia, Bendix was acutely aware of generational differences, not only through direct observation but through a very early reading, with his father,s help, of Karl Mannheim.[1] Thus he understood his coolness toward the founders of the Frankfurt School in generational terms. At the mature age of forty, his father, the legal scholar and labor lawyer Ludwig Bendix, who became well-known in the Weimar Republic, wrote critically about the Bolshevik Revolution, which was such a crucial formative experience for the "Frankfurters," then in their teens and early twenties. When Reinhard Bendix reached their age, Nazism and Stalinism appeared to him as twin totalitarian threats to human dignity and survival. Hence his abiding anti-utopianism, which separated him so much from the critical theorists. Addressing Heidelberg students on "Objective and Subjective Meaning in History" ten years ago, he explained: "I was born in 1916 and was seventeen in 1933, when Hitler came to power; I emigrated from Germany in 1938, just after Hitler had annexed Austria and the first great purge trials had been concluded in the Soviet Union. The dominant experience of my youth was not the materialism but the totalitarianism of the age, which arose from a utopian mentality, the belief in man,s ability to make the world over in his own image. At the same time, I had been exposed through my father to the teaching of Wilhelm Dilthey . . . who wanted to

1. On the life of his father, Ludwig Bendix, and his own life, see Reinhard Bendix, *From Berlin to Berkeley: German-Jewish Identities* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1986).

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combine an awareness of human conditioning and limitations with a stubborn emphasis on human consciousness and scientific reasoning."[2]

For the benefit of younger readers it may be warranted to recall Bendix' extraordinary contribution to American social science in the three decades after WWII. Kicked out of the Gymnasium in Berlin in 1933, his academic training was entirely American. His immersion in Chicago sociology still at a young age enabled him to avoid a career preoccupation with Nazism and to become a disciplinary innovator mediating European and American traditions. Already as a graduate student he published four programmatic essays, two on bureaucracy, one on Max Weber, and one on "Social Science and Social Action in Historical Perspective." Through his writing and teaching — in the early stages in collaboration with the younger Seymour Martin Lipset — Bendix helped institutionalize the postwar fields of industrial sociology, stratification, formal organization (bureaucracy), modernization theory, and finally a comparative form of historical sociology.[3] Yet despite his closeness to central substantive concerns of American sociology, Bendix also remained an outsider. He became president of the American Sociological Association in 1970, but his skeptical European historicism ultimately kept him distant from the American faith in a "science of society."

Bendix left behind a completed and an uncompleted task from his last years. The first is the two volume edition of his collected essays, *Embattled Reason*, in which the individual essays are connected with autobiographical explanations and new reflections.[4] The second is the unfinished draft of a short book on "Changing Definitions of Community in Western Civilization," which ranges from ancient Judaism and early Christianity through the scientific and industrial revolution to the French and Russia revolutions. In recent years he also had begun a "Late Diary" (*Spätes Tagebuch*), which consists of personal observations and general reflections — his first attempt to write in German again after more than forty years, an effort to recover expressive possibilities rooted in his

2. Reinhard Bendix, *Force, Fate, and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 42. This is the English version of his Heidelberg Max Weber Lectures of 1981, *Freiheit und historisches Schicksal* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982).

3. See the pioneering study in industrial sociology by Bendix and Lipset, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). For a decade the standard reader in social stratification was Bendix and Lipset, eds., *Class, Status, and Power* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953; 2nd. ed., 1966); for political sociology, see Bendix et al., eds., *State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Political Sociology* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968; 2nd. ed., 1974). Bendix's two most influential comparative studies are: *Work and Authority in Industry: Ideologies of Management in the Course of Industrialization* (New York; Wiley, 1956; 2nd. ed., 1974) and *Nation-Building and Citizenship* (New York: Wiley, 1964; 2nd. ed., 1976). His studies on Max Weber include: *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (New York: Doubleday, 1960; 2nd. ed., 1977) and, with Guenther Roth, *Scholarship and Partisanship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971; 2nd. ed., 1980). His major work in comparative historical sociology is: *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

4. Reinhard Bendix, *Embattled Reason. Essays on Social Knowledge* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988/89), 2 Vols.

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first language (and sacrificed for English academic prose).

Last summer Bendix returned to his native Berlin to watch with mixed emotions the approaching German unification and to prepare a last chapter of his unfinished book (with the help of Sigrid Meuschel). This chapter would have dealt with the breakdown of communist regimes and the challenges of German unification. Parts of his speech at Humboldt University would have gone into this chapter. When he was invited several months ahead of the occasion, he tried to figure out a way to explain political modernity to younger people who had grown up without it and, at best, had gotten glimpses of parliamentary government through West German TV. He drew on earlier work, especially on his well-known investigation of the Soviet methods of imposing a command economy in East Germany in the early 1950s. The lecture was not successful in that the high level of anxiety on the part of the students and professors, immediately before the currency reform, made them unwilling or unable to discuss the issues raised. Still, it is interesting to see how the old ex-Berliner tried to explain to younger East Berliners the meaning of epochal events that were engulfing them.

Bendix's experiences taught him early the fragility of civilized life and the precariousness of physical well-being. His prolific scholarship had not only wide-ranging intellectual motives, but deep existential springs. Being productive was a victory not only over political persecution but over the physical precariousness of existence. He knew Goethe's work intimately and doubtless was mindful of Goethe's maxim "to act as long as it is day. When night falls, it is too late."

*State, Legitimation and "Civil Society"**

Reinhard Bendix

The concept "civil society" has become a polemical slogan opposed to Communist Party "dictatorship." Anglo-American in origin, this concept has been translated into German as *Zivilgesellschaft* and should not be confused with *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. The following attempts a conceptual clarification for an easier grasp of contemporary developments, with special emphasis on Germany.

* This is the text of a lecture delivered June 27, 1990 at Humboldt University in East Berlin. Translated and edited by G.L. Ulmen.

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"Civil society" is usually brought into relation with the state, which in Max Weber's definition combines the monopoly of power with its legitimacy: "A compulsory political organization with continuous operations (*politischer Anstaltsbetrieb*) will be called a 'state' insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order."[1] Following Gierke's work on German communal law,[2] Weber characterized the state as a "ruling organization" [*Herrschaftsverband*] — an ideal type combining compulsion with acquiescence or consent. Two theoretical guidelines follow: one should always pay attention to the threat of compulsion by an administrative staff and to the consent or acquiescence of the people concerned; and one should bear in mind that compulsion without agreement sooner or later undermines rule, whereas acquiescence as the sole basis of union removes the organization from the sphere of political orders. The same considerations apply to all other relations of domination, e.g., between employer and employee or father and son. The state differs from other types of domination by an institutional complexity which arises from its authority over the people residing within a given geographical area.

Weber emphasizes that the full development of the state is a *modern* phenomenon. This is at variance with the usual practice of calling "states" political orders such as the Greek city-state, the Roman Empire, the feudalism of the Middle Ages, modern absolutism or modern superpowers. One can designate all countries represented in the United Nations as "states," but a concept comprising all governed territories is useless. *Omnis determinatio est negatio*. For that reason, I adhere to Weber's delimitation: "Since the concept of the state has only in modern times reached its full development, it is best to define it in terms appropriate to the modern type of state, but at the same time, in terms which abstract from the values of the present day, since these are particularly subject to change. The primary formal characteristics of the modern state are as follows: It possesses an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation, to which the organized activities of the administrative staff, which are also controlled by regulations, are oriented. This system of order claims binding authority not only over the members of the state, the citizens, . . . but also to a very large extent over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction. It is thus a compulsory organization with a territorial basis. Furthermore, today, the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it."[3] As always, the application of such an ideal type poses problems.

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1. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978), Vol. 1, p. 54.

2. Otto von Gierke, *Deutsches Genossenschaftsrecht* (Berlin: Weidmann Verlag, 1868-1913), 4 vols.; selections translated into English by Mary Fischer under the title *Community in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

3. Weber, *Economy and Society*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 56. See Ernest Barker, *The Development of Public Services in Western Europe, 1660-1930* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1944), pp. 4-5.

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The concept of the state can be traced to Machiavelli, Bodin and Hobbes. But the English, French or Prussian institutionalization of the state had its beginnings only in the 17th century. Ernest Barker has made us aware that premodern political orders, i.e., non-state orders in Weber's sense, derive from an identification of the public sphere and public office with family, inherited wealth and social rank. Surely no on would claim that family relations, property or social prestige no longer play any role in the modern state or that contemporary influences of this sort are comparable with the former significance of inherited privileges. It must always remain possible to treat the attributes of an ideal type as approximations to be investigated in particular cases.

The same reservation applies to the "full development" of the modern state. There seems to be agreement that the state's monopoly of power becomes operative at the following levels: 1) legislation (including administrative regulations); 2) maintenance of order; 3) national defense; 4) currency regulation; 5) administration of justice; 6) taxation; 7) public works, the so-called infrastructure; 8) public assistance. Each of these state functions presupposes a bureaucracy, i.e., (ideal-typically) an administration governed by laws and rules, not personal considerations. These functions are constantly changing and cannot be defined once and for all. In terms of the state, their peculiarity lies in that they are monopolistic, i.e., the central government bears the responsibility for them and they must not be privately appropriated. Each of these functions is the focal point of political disagreements which, however, do not alter the state's monopoly of power. Thus it is always necessary to turn to the state and its administration to alter a disputed regulation. How does this square with two aspects of the present situation that manifestly run counter to it?

First, illegal actions seem to displace the state's monopoly of power over a particular area. This means that the state's monopoly of power is as approximate as all other functions. But illegality is also no static concept, and the phenomenon can expand to the point that it challenges the state's monopoly of power. Well-known examples are criminal syndicates, the spread of an illegal economy in the Soviet Union, or para-military groups in the Weimar Republic. Presumably, such illegalities cannot be eliminated altogether. The question is, however, whether they come to prevail. If that is the case, and it is usually recognized too late, then the state's monopoly of power is lost. As long as illegal activities remain localized and can be prosecuted case by case, the state's monopoly holds.

Second, totalitarian orders seem to contradict Weber's definition of the state. Dictatorship in general, and party dictatorships with totalitarian tendencies in particular, run counter to the *legitimation* of the state precisely because they buttress its monopolization of power both organizationally and ideologically so as to exclude all political opposition.

The expression "legitimacy" became widespread with the Holy Alliance's effort to preserve princely claims to rule. Yet the idea of legitimate rule is very old. However, modern states are characterized by the fact that they no longer have to do with the legitimacy of dynastic rules of succession but with the

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legitimation of a state's monopoly of power. The difference is important in two respects. The legitimacy of a king may be beyond dispute. But there are strong and weak kings, which suggests that the concept of monarchy is not static. Consequently, since even a weak king appears irreplaceable, the sacred legitimacy of kings remains intact, even if personal weakness is a recurring basis of rival claims and struggles over succession to the throne. By contrast, the modern state's monopoly of power presents a complex of *impersonally* grounded institutions whose legitimation is based on a customary process. Where there is general agreement, such as in the case of traffic regulations, the impersonal and customary function is confirmed. Where the consensus is confined only to particular groups, state administration tends to become more personal, i.e., more political.

Note that the secular legitimation of a state's monopoly of power concerns trust in the reliability of institutions. Is such a vague state of affairs definable? A bank can only function if its depositors trust that they can withdraw their money when needed. At the same time, the bank must invest a great part of its holdings in order to cover its costs and make a profit. Thus a secure bank is based on the unspoken mutual trust between the depositors and the bankers (presumed to be honorable and to know their business). Accordingly, the relation between the contracting parties concerns the legitimation of banking by the repeated satisfaction of mutual expectations.

Mutual expectations based on trust are a multifaceted phenomenon. Friendship is a personal form of this reciprocity, the most impersonal being agreement on a firm price. Bargaining lies somewhere in between. Although the analogy of banking makes clear the fulfillment or disappointment of mutual expectations, as in any model there are limitations to this one as well. On the one hand, depositors as well as bankers are able to base their respective expectations on the legal security of their interests; on the other, both parties are ultimately only linked by the exchange of money, however complicated that might also be. By contrast, relations between citizens and the state are much less clearly definable. For the most part, these relations have no legal guarantees; they approximate bargaining much more than friendship or agreement on a firm price. Despite these qualifications, the bank model is instructive in interpreting the legitimation of the state's monopoly of power.

The reciprocal expectations of depositors and bankers are supported by state controls so long as everything goes well. The present crisis of the American Savings and Loan Associations demonstrates what happpens when these controls are removed, the public insurance of deposits remains, and the door is opened to risky investments. Owing to this guarantee, until now there has been no catastrophe, but the financial crisis can only be solved at the taxpayers' expense. A comparison can be drawn with the years of inflation in the Weimar Republic, which ended in catastrophe because the government, intent on reducing the rapidly rising cost of the public household, caused inflation through the increased printing of money. The social unrest of 1923 was a signal of massive public dissatisfaction with the government, resulting in a loss of legitimacy,

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just as the "velvet revolution" in East Germany was an answer to the suddenly obvious weakness of the communist government following the Soviets' political retreat. This weakness can be traced to illegitimacy, i.e., to the fact that mutual expectations between party and population failed to be repeatedly confirmed. It is well known that Brecht found a biting formula for the worker uprising in East Berlin in 1953, namely that "The people have lost the trust of their government and can only get it back through doubling their work. Would it not be simpler for the government to dissolve the people and vote in another?"[4]

Communist governments base themselves on the Party's claim to be the only legitimate voice of the working masses. This claim ultimately goes back to historical materialism, which claims to be the only true interpretation of world history as a "history of class struggle." This is the basis of Lenin's distinction between professional revolutionaries, who "have worked out the theoretical understanding of the whole historical movement," and the workers who have only a trade union consciousness. Lenin's distinction is based on the Marxist thesis that a part of the "bourgeois ideologists" go over to the revolutionary class and constitute its vanguard. It was only a small step further to the monopolistic claim of the Communist Party. How was this claim organizationally accomplished and how did it thereby simultaneously jeopardize its own popular legitimation. A summary answer must proceed from the Party's monopoly of power. Power means "the probability that one actor . . . will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance."[5] In this case, it means the absolute freedom of decision at the pinnacle of the hierarchy and the total responsibility of all persons below. Walter Ulbricht spelled out the *application* of this principle with commendable clarity more than forty years ago. Even true comrades, he said, ignore the laws of social development and "do not understand that what was yesterday correct is today already overtaken and incorrect." The Party leadership thus reclaimed the option to change directives from day to day without taking responsibility for such, because *every* decision can be legitimated on the basis of the one true knowledge of those "laws." Consequently, all responsibility lies with the subordinates, as Ulbricht reminded them when he argued that "the word *impossible* must for all time be banned from the German language."[6] This meant that the Party leadership attributed every deviation from the plan to the errors of the Party rank and file, while putting the whole working population under the pressure of an institutional suspicion.

The communist one-party system lacks legitimation because it destroys the possibility of regular reciprocity between rulers and ruled. The Party monopolization of truth and the total suspicion cast on the entire population generated a

4. Bertolt Brecht, "Die Lösung" from *Buckower Elegien* in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976), Vol. III, pp. 1009-10.

5. Weber, *Economy and Society*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 53.

6. Reinhard Bendix, *Work and Authority in Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 384, 386.

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Manichean worldview on the ideological as well as the organizational level. *Every* social activity became subject to dual control by Party functionaries. The industrial sector provided a striking example of this. On the one hand, Party functionaries had to wholeheartedly support the orders of the factory managers by means of agitation and control. On the other hand, they had to publicly expose and correct all failures of the factory directorates through contact with the masses. Thus factory managers were subordinate to the plans of the ministries, whereas the cadres were controlled by the higher Party bodies. Consequently, there was a Kafkaesque guarantee of Party infallibility which, according to the changing Party line, could, when needed, pressure factory managers or workers by means of suspicion. This technique of control explains fluctuations of the Party-line, for a simultaneous pressure on both managers and workers would deprive the Party leadership of its capacity to maneuver at will.[7]

Even in this ideal type of communist domination, much depended on the management of the Party leadership. Before the building of the Wall in 1961, approximately three million people or 17% of the population of East Germany emigrated. After the building of the Wall, the regime achieved a temporary truce between the Party apparatus and the population through reforms and the development of the social security system. Even with the claim of infallibility and the deliberate manipulation of suspicion, it was still possible to excuse certain abuses of the regime and, thereby, to achieve a minimal legitimation. In retrospect we know that these strategies were insufficient and that an effective legitimation of communist domination was undermined years ago.

The effectiveness of legitimizing reciprocity between the state and the people can be only approximate. Whether it is sufficient for the maintenance of a political order can only be determined after the fact. The reason for this is that one cannot foresee the attitudes with which the people concerned regard the "existence of a legitimate order." This is not only due to the reciprocity of the contracting parties, but also to traditions, habits and legal sentiments, as well as the mixture of fear and hope which determines the reaction of the ruled to the exercise of power.[8] These conditions arise in a social context which can be understood as "civil society."

The Anglo-American concept of "civil society" is not synonymous with *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. The adjective *bürgerlich* goes back to the medieval cities and applies to those able to obtain a permit of residence and a place in the given social order. Later, the concept acquired a more specific meaning. With Hegel *bürgerlich* came to be understood as signifying a balance between the individual and the community on the level of needs, freedom and security. With Marx, who dispensed with this legal-philosophical distinction, it came to signify

7. Documentation of this structure of domination in the former East Germany is found in the sixth chapter of my book on *Work and Authority, op. cit.*, pp. 367 ff.

8. My formulation has reference to Weber's analysis, which states that: "Submission to an order is almost always determined by a variety of interests and by a mixture of adherence to tradition and belief in legality. See *Economy and Society*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-38.

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ownership of the means of production and became a criterion of membership in the bourgeois class. Hegel's "civil society" became Marx's "bourgeois society." By contrast, the adjective "civil" refers to personal circles active in public life. In the 18th century, William Blackstone declared that the "civil state" consists of aristocracy and clergy, a meaning which was changed into state citizenship through the revolutionary destruction of inherited privilege.[9]

In the course of recent East European protest movements, the English term "civil society" has become a political slogan against Communist Party-dictatorships; as such it has much resonance and little content. At best, market society is mentioned as an example of "civil society," while the problematic aspects of free competition are seen as insignificant in view of the failure of central planning. "Civil society" is considered positive, because it is seen as antithetical to Party dictatorship. The American Left also sees "civil society" in a positive light, but with almost the exact opposite meaning. The expression serves to legitimate the more or less anarchic protest movements against market economy and inequality, against parliamentarism and formal rights. In this case, the term becomes a symbol for the positive meaning of community as opposed to democracy and capitalism. In view of these ideologizing tendencies one must seek to reestablish a serviceable meaning of "civil society," which in Germany is neither linguistically nor culturally grounded.

The modern meaning of "civil society"arose from the Enlightenment and was transformed in the French Revolution into the idea of citizenship. In a 1751 article on political authority, Diderot wrote: "No man has received from nature the right to command others. . . . If nature has established any *authority*, it is paternal control, but paternal control has its limits, and in the state of nature it would terminate when the children could take care of themselves. Any other *authority* . . . comes [either] from the force and violence of an individual, who has seized it, or the consent of those who have submitted to it by a contract made or assumed between them and the individual."[10] Formulations of this sort culminated in the 1789 declaration of the rights of man, which express the principle of the nation-state. According to Abbé Sieyès, the *nation* is always legal, because the rightness of the law arises only from the national will. By contrast, governmental power has *validity* only insofar as it remains within the constitutional framework and expresses enacted laws. However, since the nation cannot act as a totality, it needs a body of representatives who, though they represent the interests of their constituencies, enact laws through discussion and compromise and thereby express the general will.[11]

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9. Blackstone's citation is found in the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which contains also a synopsis of the shifting significance of the adjective "civil." (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), Vol. II, p. 446.

10. Denis Diderot, "Political Authority," in Stephen Gendzier, ed., *The Encyclopedia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 185.

11. Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 367-69.

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One can derive the modern meaning of "civil society" quite well from the misgivings emphasized by Rousseau and discussed ever since the French and American revolutions. As is well known, Rousseau distinguished between the egoistic will of all individuals and the common or general will. In order to overcome this antithesis, he recommended educational measures to promote the surrender of individual desires to the common good. This goal can be achieved: "If the people came to a resolution when adequately informed and *without any communication among the Citizens*, the general will would always result from the great number of slight differences, and the resolution would always be good. But when factions, partial associations, are formed to the detriment of the whole society, the will of each of these assocations becomes general with reference to its members, and in particular with reference to the State; it may then be said that there are no longer as many voters as there are men, but only as many voters as there are associations."[12] This idea accorded with the suspicion the leaders of the American Constitutional Assembly harbored with respect to party factions. Similarly, most democratic constitutions provide for freedom of assembly, but not for the formation of political parties.

France is a good example that these were not only theoretical considerations. The Jesuits dominated the country's educational system until 1764, when they were forbidden because the education of children was deemed to be exclusively a state function. The same principle was reiterated in the Revolution: against the private administration of Jewish communities, because they would thereby create a "nation within the nation"; against labor unions, because it should be the task of the nation to care for the welfare of workers; and further against religious bodies, academic and literary societies, as well as women's organizations. "The main difficulty arises from the interest through which the individual citizen associates only with a few others. Such interest leads to conspiracy and secret agreements; antisocial plans are made thereby; and by these the worst enemies of the people mobilize."[13] The fact remains, that the significance of "civil society" is due precisely to these types of private associations.

The experience of democratic orders has demonstrated that the antithesis between the state's monopoly of power and civil society's private associations must be maintained if democracy is not to degenerate into anarchy or dictatorship. That can occur for a variety of reasons. Tocqueville recognized that, in an age of equality, the individual wants to remain independent in order to pursue his own interests. But frequently he can only achieve his goals if — within certain rules — he associates with others, but without aiming at any public responsibility. Civil associations are able to do more than the individual. In the

12. J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. by Charles Sherover (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 45.

13. Emmanuel Joseph Sièyes, *What is the Third Estate?* (New York: Frederick Praeger Publishers, 1963), p. 159. Sieyes was a clergyman, a Freemason and an active member of the National Assembly of 1789.

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contemporary welfare state, however, even they are not enough. If public tasks such as care for the elderly, public transport, health services, unemployment insurance, etc. outstrip the powers of the individual or of organized interests, then voters or private associations appeal to the state to achieve these goals through taxation. As long as this is done, associations also legitimate thereby the power and the principle of the state, although the degree of legitimation depends on the willingness of the people to be taxed and on the state's ability to realize their goals. The state loses its legitimacy when the people despair of realizing their goals through the state. Then the question becomes how long the state, through its monopoly of power, can postpone the final accounting, and what situationally determined degree of despair will prompt people to take to the streets to express their disappointed expectations.

In this sense, one can speak of a reciprocal legitimation of the state's monopoly of power and of "civil society." Differently formulated, one finds it already in Hegel: "The expansion of the family, as its transition into a new principle, is in the external world sometimes its peaceful expansion until it becomes a people, i.e. a nation, which thus has a common natural origin, or sometimes the federation of scattered familial communities, either under the influence of an overlord's power or as a result of a voluntary association produced by shared needs and the reciprocity of their satisfaction."[14] Today we must add that a monopoly of power entrusted to a one-party state, which would have been inconceivable to Hegel, destroys the principle of reciprocity. Alternatively, from the side of "civil society," the state's monopoly of power can be undermined by the unwillingness of ideologically rigidified associations to reach compromises, as was demonstrated by the Weimar Republic.

From this viewpoint, East Germany has yet to face the problem of a reciprocal development of the representative and the plebiscitary principles.[15] The country was ruled by a one-party regime for 57 years. The totalitarian Party assumed representation of the whole population and declared each one of its actions to be the result of a plebiscite. This extraordinary joining of the representative and the plebiscitary principles in the Party's monopoly of power is now broken.

From now on, representation means advocacy of the interests of one part of the population which must be reconciled with the interests of other parts. Thus the people must be prepared to live with compromises reached in parliament or in other governing bodies, which is accompanied by as many dissatisfactions as the market principle. In order to express their desires and dissatisfactions, voters periodically go to the polls, yet many problems remain. Voting participation changes and is often insufficient. The relation between decisions made at the polls and legislative decisions is difficult to determine. There is a gross disparity

14. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, tr. with notes by T.M. Knox (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 122.

15. Cf. Ernst Fraenkel, *Die repräsentative und die plebiszitäre Komponente im demokratischen Verfassungsstaat*, Vol. 219-20 of "Recht und Staat" (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958).

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between personal affairs and bureaucratic formalities. This and other problems entail a great deal of public frustration and, at the same time, require that the people are nevertheless prepared to participate in the political process.

How can people come to terms with these experiences after half a century of dictatorship? Of course, especially in a democracy, there is always the possibility of public demonstrations, which bring collective resentment to the fore. Recent protests against the state security network (Stasi) and those associated with it in the former East Germany is a good example. But it also shows the limits of these means. The devil is in the detail of working through 18 km. of personnel files, which, if legally conducted, would require an enormous bureaucratic apparatus. The chances for such procedure are minimal because of its cost, the lack of political will and the reluctance of a democratic order to use more drastic means. But demonstrations can only result in momentary and negative political decisions. A modern industrial state cannot be governed in this way.

Similar questions arise for politicians. They cannot fall back on the power monopoly of the party and have no special privileges. Public dissatisfaction with institutions will not be as acute as it was under dictatorship, but it will not disappear. The politicians will take care of their voting districts and be in contact with the people, maintain their place in the party organization, interact with other representatives in the election and, what is most difficult, seek to make highly visible political decisions. In Germany, the word "leadership" must become respectable once again if democracy, with all its difficulties, is to be realized. The democratic order cannot be legitimated if the reciprocity of state power and the citizens' political participation is not rewarded by effective decision-making and implementation.

This issue cannot be divorced from the long-term problems of German reunification. The Nazi past has been discussed in the Federal Republic since its very beginning. It came up once again in the so-called *Historikerstreit*, where traditional German ambivalence to the Anglo-American West played a subliminal role. Indications are that the eastern part of the country will not be spared such a discussion. Questions of German national consciousness will be more important and long-lasting, and such questions must also again be dealt with if the reunification of Germany is not to be limited to the slogan "One people, one country, one currency." The relation between the former East Germany and the Federal Republic will be a very complicated settling of accounts of a political-psychological nature. Leaving the massive work of officials and experts aside, it is likely that thoughtless self-righteousness from the side of the Federal Republic and moral indignation in the former "Democratic People's Republic"will play an insidious role. But all these things are in flux and it is well to conclude this conceptual clarification in an open-ended manner, with many questions left for further consideration.

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*Hitler's Successor: Saddam Hussein in the Context of German History**

Hans Magnus Enzensberger

When Adolf Hitler died in his bunker April 30, 1945, most of the survivors believed he was a unique figure who could not be compared to any other violent criminal in history. This conviction, a combination of horror and hope, has proved to be an illusion. Hitler was not unique. As long as millions of people long passionately for his return, the fulfillment of this wish is only a question of time.

Reasonably enough, the postwar era has insisted on the singularity of German crimes and has rejected any comparison with other instances of state terror. All too often such parallels have merely served to exonerate the perpetrators, and to that extent the taboo appeared ultimately to make sense — at least morally, if not intellectually. For every attempt to understand historical events is dependent on experience, i.e., on comparison. Where substantial similarities exist, comparisons are not only permitted but necessary. I would like to try to demonstrate that talk of Saddam Hussein as a successor to Hitler is not journalistic metaphor, not propagandistic exaggeration, but rather captures the essence of the matter.

We do not do justice to the Iraqi leader by underestimating how dangerous he is, by viewing him merely as a traditional despot or a modern dictator. Unlike figures like Franco, Batista, Marcos, Pinochet and fifty others like them still in power today, it has not been Saddam Hussein's goal simply to oppress a people, to dominate and exploit them and to do so for his own gratification for as long as possible. Dictators of this sort are part of the repertoire of history; one might even say they are part of the normal order of modern states as we know them. There is nothing mysterious about these monsters. They are led by their drive for self-preservation. Thus they act in accordance with a calculating interest and, in turn, are themselves calculable.

Hitler knew himself to be free of such trappings. It is precisely in this that

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Saddam Hussein is his genuine successor. He is not fighting against this or that domestic or foreign political opponent; his enemy is the world. Aggression is the primary driving force; objects, opportunities and reasons are sought where they are found. Whoever is first in line for extermination, whether Iranians or Kurds, Saudis or Palestinians, Kuwaitis or Israelis, depends only on the available opportunities. Not even his own people receive special status; its extermination is merely the last act in the mission Saddam sees as his calling. His motive is the death wish; his mode of domination, destruction. All his actions are directed to this end. The rest is planning and organization. His only desire is the privilege to be the last to die.

The parallel to Hitler is obvious. The German *Führer* was also not concerned with the defeat of domestic or foreign opponents. He was not only the mortal enemy of the Jews, the Czechs, the Poles, the English, the French, the Dutch, Belgians, Scandinavians, the Balkan peoples, the Russians and the Americans, but in the end of Germans as well. Let us just call him, descriptively and without any demonic intention, an enemy of the human race. The obscene pictures in which Saddam shows himself fondling children he has taken hostage resemble down to the last detail the same body language of those taken 50 years earlier at Obersalzberg.

Viewed alone, as an isolated subject, the enemy of the human race is a banal, even an unimpressive phenomenon. We will never know how many like him there are among us, as failed artists or random killers at the next crossroad or in the most distant jungle village. A Hitler, a Saddam, can only enter into history when entire peoples long for their arrival. The power of such figures does not emerge from the barrel of a gun but, rather, out of the boundless love and self-sacrifice of their followers.

Any comparison between Hitler and Saddam thus necessarily entails a second comparison between the masses which make themselves available as either persecutors or victims. "The Germans were the Iraqis from 1938 to 1945." Although this statement not only has logic on its side, but could instantly illuminate the inner dynamic of the Gulf war, it is all too understandable why it does not appear in a tabloid like *Bild-Zeitung*. Nothing could be further from the minds of Germans today than to recognize themselves in the Arab masses. Such an insight would undermine any racist interpretation of the conflict. Moreover, it would bring to light hidden continuities, residues of a fascism of which no one wants to be reminded. German industry has never had to regret the devoted service it rendered Hitler; it is thus only logical that it is similarly all too eager to help his successor. And if a considerable portion of German youth identifies more readily with the Palestinians than with the Israelis, if they prefer to protest against George Bush rather than against Saddam Hussein, this fact can hardly be explained away by lack of awareness.

In light of past experience, there is no people better qualified than the Germans to understand what is happening today in the Arab world. Every other interview that takes place between Rabat and Baghdad must echo in the German

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people's ears like the sound of their own voice: "We want to continue to march until everything falls to pieces." The wiping out of cities, the fanatic hatred, the "mother of all wars," final battle, final victory: Who has forgotten the frenzied jubilation with which these slogans have been greeted and with which thousands have answered the famous question: "Do you want total war?"

It was not just the license to kill that inspired the Germans, but, even more, the prospect of being killed themselves. Millions of Arabs today express the desire to die for Saddam Hussein just as fervently. "Our people want to smell Saddam Hussein's poison gas and die," said Assad el-Tamini, a Palestinian mullah in Jordan. The leader will do everything in his power to fulfill this wish. "The German people are not worthy of surviving," said Hitler at the end of his career. Saddam Hussein regards his own people in the same way.

It was not the Germans who kept Hitler from completing his program. The energy of the leader and the led was sufficient to cause inconceivable crimes and to turn Europe into rubble. Yet, despite their determination to send even the last remaining member of the Hitler Youth into the fire, not only the allied victors but also the Germans survived.

Efforts to explain the Germans' behavior went on for decades after the war. An entire generation of scholars tried to explain Hitler and what ensued in terms of the historical particularity of the Germans, their unique character, their supposedly different culture. One is reminded of the historians' futile attempts to capture what is inexplicable in the deeds of kings and chancellors, or in the thought of Nietzsche, Wagner and Luther. Today, Middle East experts advance similar arguments. In the Middle East one is dealing with something simply different, they say, a completely incomparable culture, a mentality that must be decoded. What is at stake are religious presuppositions incomprehensible to the ignorant outside world.

These are reassuring hypotheses, for they give the impression that the problem can be easily contained. If the morbid ecstasy of Hitler and his followers could simply be reduced to some peculiar German trait, then it would have been sufficient to cordon off their territory and to subject them to continual control, and the rest of the world could have lived undisturbed thereafter. If the determination to practice genocide were the Iraqis' cultural or religious specialty, one could deal with Saddam and his people in the same way. The time has come to dismiss such illusions once and for all. The new enemy of humanity is not different than the previous ones. Regardless of their entirely different conditions, his admirers' impulses are identical to those of our fathers and grandfathers and they pursue the same goal. This continuation proves we are not dealing with a specifically German or Arab fact, but with an anthropological one.

This is not to say that the enemy of humanity could appear anywhere, suddenly, out of the darkness. The condition necessary for finding followers who long for ruin is the feeling of a long-lasting collective injury that erodes the sense of self-worth of millions. From this perspective as well, the Germans

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could recognize themselves again in the Arabs, if they had a better memory.

In his *Studien über die Deutschen*, Norbert Elias explained how and for what reasons this people, at least since the Thirty Years War, saw itself as an eternal loser. After the Treaty of Versailles, the feeling of humiliation became virulent, and, in the 1929 world economic crisis, became an overwhelming obsession. The parallel with the peoples of the Middle East is obvious. If a collective no longer sees an opportunity to make up for its real *and* imaginary degradation by its own efforts, it musters all its psychological energy to store up immeasurable amounts of hatred and envy, resentment and need for revenge. It feels itself to be a victim of circumstance and denies any responsibility for its situation. The search for the guilty party can begin.

Then the hour of the *Führer* has come. The enemy of humanity can arm himself with the combined death energy of the masses, which gives him power bordering on genius: the infallible sense for unconscious stirrings of his followers. He does not operate with arguments but with emotions that unhinge any form of logic.

This is why all attempts to interpret him or even to disprove him ideologically fail. His project is not advanced by ideas, but by obsessions. The notions he exploits are all the more powerful the closer they come to madness. The paranoia that is only able to explain real occurrences with conspiracy and treachery is thus not the leader's individual illness but, rather, the precondition of his actions and of the response he finds. For this, the hatred of Jews is the ideal vehicle, a feeling that consumed Hitler and his followers in the same way it consumes their successors today.

Moreover, the enemy of humanity must keep away from his followers anything reminiscent of an idea. He creates an intellectual vacuum that can then be filled at will with arbitrary elements from the corresponding tradition. In this way Hitler exploited German nationalistic and anti-capitalistic sentiments and blustered about Teutonic culture, blood and soil, while Saddam prefers anti-colonial, pan-Arabist and Islamic themes. The ideological trappings are exchanged at will. Contents are immaterial to the leader. This allows him to exchange his enemies at any time as well. Hitler could proclaim Bolshevism as a mortal enemy, an ally, and then again as a mortal enemy without being harmed in the eyes of his followers. For Saddam, the eight-year war of aggression against Iran, which supposedly cost a million people their lives, was an inconsequential trifle. Nothing would be more convenient to him than a fraternal alliance with Tehran.

It it a fatal error to attribute convictions to Hitler or Saddam. They consider tradition nothing but a warehouse of explosives. The magic runic spell of the one, like the prayer-rug of the other, has misled many into seeing something atavistic in their projects, a "reversion" to a supposed Middle Ages or to the barbarism of some prehistory. This is a dangerous misunderstanding of tradition. The enemy of the human race is a 20th century phenomenon, every bit as progressive as the media, the poison gas and the missiles he uses to reach his goal.

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The pacifists are right when they say that politics has failed with Saddam Hussein. It was no different with Hitler. Then, as now, the world did not want to come to terms with what it confronted. Foreign governments regarded Hitler as a statesman representing "legitimate concerns," whom one had to accommodate, with whom one had to negotiate. The winners of WWI welcomed him as an "agent of stability," as a trading partner, as a counterweight to the Soviet threat; in other words, one dealt with him on a normal political level and trusted that it was a matter of solving conflicts of interest.

Such an attitude, however, implicitly assumes that all parties involved are interested in their own survival. With this assumption, the world thoroughly misjudged Hitler. He alone knew what he wanted: a horrific end. What appeared to the outside world as a break with reality was nothing but the determination to pursue this goal with all means. Thus Hitler was able to interpret the willingness to negotiate as a weakness; the idea of reciprocity was incomprehensible to him; compromises filled him with disgust, contractual solutions with contempt; and he reacted to concessions with rage, since they interfered with the pursuit of his ultimate goal. No conceivable policy, however clever, however prudent, is adequate for such an enemy. In the end, he always gets what he wants: war. His triumph lies in the fact that he succeeds in taking the whole world, including his followers, hostage. Even in his own death he can enjoy the knowledge that he caused millions of others to die before him. The elimination of Hitler cost countless human beings their lives. The price for the removal of Saddam Hussein will be astronomical, even if the fulfillment of his wish to unleash a nuclear war is denied by a hair's breadth.

His successors may not be limited by this restriction on their freedom of action. It is foreseeable that in the future other peoples will cheer their own and our executioners. There are eternal losers all over the world. Their feeling of humiliation and the inclination to collective suicide increases every year. On the Indian subcontinent and in the Soviet Union the nuclear arsenal awaits. Where Hitler and Saddam failed in the final victory — the Final Solution — their successors may succeed.

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Reviews:

What Theory? Whose Community?

Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *Modernity, Justice and Community* (Milan: Franco Angeli Libri, 1990), 240 pp.

According to some today, the Left promotes community while the Right champions the individual. A brief reflection on this claim might raise suspicions since not too long ago, political history reminds us, the Right was for community and the Left was for the individual. To talk more intelligently about such debates involves uncovering why these political positions were formed as they were, why they abruptly reversed, and what reasoning lies behind such commitments. The recent debates concerning liberalism and another alternative now called "communitarianism" provide a forum for such a reconsideration. In this collection, Passerin d'Entreves attempts what he calls a "critical reconstruction" of Habermas, Arendt and Rawls on precisely these aspects of political philosophy.

Given the ink that has been spilt on Habermas' tortuous prose, d'Entreves does contribute some clarity and brevity in his addition to that list of summaries. Unfortunately, he adds very little to these seemingly endless reprises and, specifically, very little criticism and analysis. He summarizes Habermas' views about rationality and cultural change, as they are laboriously elaborated in those two dense volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action*. But I find it perplexing, given d'Entreves' lengthy discussions of Arendt and Rawls, that he, on the whole, ignores Habermas' attempt to connect his views about communication with a theory of ethics and justice.

It is hard to quibble with d'Entreves' mild, uncritical conclusion that "Habermas defends the project of modernity in terms of the progress made in the forces of production, social wealth and legal-moral structures, but admits that a just and emancipated society may not be a fulfilled one" (p. 23). But Habermas disappears from the debate in the remainder of d'Entreves' book. It might be useful then to supply a quick summary of Habermas' strategy on issues of justice and ethics, as that relates to the following discussion of Arendt, Rawls and communitarianism.

Like many modern philosophers, Habermas became convinced that there was no method for the acquisition of knowledge. This skeptical conclusion about the nature of science, however, was interpreted by him as providing a

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defense for the objectivity and defensibility of value judgements, in contrast to the positivist orthodoxy on this point. In other words, if science did not possess a method, and yet it progressed and admitted of objective judgments, then perhaps its success depends only on consensus. Science is whatever the community of scientists accepts and judges as knowledge. By parallel reasoning, moral skepticism can be answered by a moral form of consensus. Thus in the essay "*Wahrheitstheorien*," where some of this argument is found, Habermas begins by outlining a consensus theory of truth with a strong sociological dimension. Since he is also a fallibilist, he admits that we can never be certain that the consensus is really rational, that what we take as "warranted assertibility" is the final word, or that the truth has been reached even with such a rational consensus. This approach is not totally unique, having been taken by Charles Sanders Pierce in virtual isolation in the late 19th century, and perhaps by Thomas Kuhn. What Habermas adds is a peculiar condition that extends this consensus from epistemology to ethics and stipulates that the consensus be formed by a wholly ideal speech situation. It is this condition that leads to Habermas' theory of justice.

Habermas' ethical contractarianism is quite straightforward, but theoretically weak. Simply put, justice or just procedures are those that we would all agree to under ideal conditions of communication. By ideal conditions Habermas means those conditions where everyone would know their "real" interests and where there would be no coercion or ideology. Those who are aware of Rawls' theory will recognize a vague similarity here in the effort to extract conditions of impartiality from a contractual hypothesis. However, Habermas' version of such an ideal contractual agreement is simply not a solution.

The decision of Habermas' hypothetical contractors is impossible to specify or determine given the way the situation is specified. Thus the theory provides no guidance and thus no advantage over the myriad of alternative accounts of justice or the formation of social consensus. Often enough the use of idealization, such as a frictionless surface, is valuable since it allows a theory to abstract the key variables in the solution of a problem. But idealization is not a tool for its own sake, nor is it a solution to simply imagine the right answer under ideal conditions. In such a case one simply projects the very problem to be answered (namely agreement on ultimate ends in society) and that takes theoretical debate no further. Finally, all one finds in the various commentaries on Habermas, as in, for example, Seyla Benhabib's piece contrasting (with almost humorous metaphysical machinery) "liberal dialogue" from "the critical theory of discursive justification," are various rhetorical flourishes culminating in a list of very familiar liberal policies; but all paid for in the coin of Germanic pomposity.[1]

1. Seyla Benhabib, "Liberal Dialogue Versus a Critical Theory of Discursive Legitimation" in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. by Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). In fairness, Benhabib does say of the ideal speech

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But how did so-called Critical Theory, borne flailing at the ideological pretension of bourgeois ethics, end up in a contract theory of ethics? The answer is simply that the implicit values in traditional and critical Marxism, used to condemn exploitation, alienation, or straightforward injustice, could no longer be left as "intuitions" to be clarified or debated in that post-revolutionary idyll of farming in the morning, criticism in the afternoon, and opera in the evening. The dangers and threats found in large scale social reconstruction, which would be impossible to even summarize at this late date in the 20th century, cannot continue to be promoted without a critical discussion of these underlying evaluative concepts *prior* to implementing vast projects of social reform.[2] Such is also the case with even more "limited" reform movements such as affirmative action and the introduction of sex-blind social practices. Unfortunately, the effort to produce such an ethical foundation for social change has not provided any viable alternative to 19th century utilitarianism or the kind of Kantian contractual rights theory that so fascinates both Habermas and Rawls. Of course, for all theorists who carbonate their Marxism with a spurt of Hegel, there remains the allure of some transcendence of civil society by a superior ethical community. This final option emerges as the leitmotif of d'Entreves' book. But it is not clear that such a strong communitarianism, if that is a good term for this kind of neo-Hegelianism, is either much of an improvement over the dangers inherent in coercive social transformation or any less alienating than the liberalism it is meant

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situation; "this model appears empty only because its critics have not appreciated that the purpose of the discourse theory of legitimacy is not to develop a blueprint for social order but to suggest a critical vantage point from which to judge power relations in our societies" (p.150-51). Since no one argues for blueprints anymore, the model is empty precisely because the critical vantage point is indeterminate. Thus the extravagant hypothesis does nothing more, and in fact a great deal less, than any traditional competitor. Benhabib proves this redundancy by concluding the article with the following sort of recommendations: "that work conditions and the terms of the contract regulating the labor-capital relation be made public issues . . . the universal extension of civil and political rights to nonwhite peoples . . . allow and protect the position of women in the public sphere as citizens and wage earners" (pp. 154-55). Even granting these political positions without the more extensive discussion they each deserve, defending such relatively innocuous, liberal positions (at least in the way she has formulated them as part and parcel with rights) through Habermas's ideal conditions of communication is needlessly complex, highly implausible, and unlikely to convince anyone not already a convert.

2. Allen Wood in "The Marxian Critique of Justice," in *Marx, Justice and History*, ed. by Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel and Thomas Scanlon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 3-41, gives a close textual argument that Marx's account of exploitation requires no concept of justice or ethics. But, of course, this reading presupposes the viability of both Marx's concept of historical laws and science. Needless to say, such ideas are just as controversial as the problem of justice and, for the purposes of this review, I assume that critical theorists and neo-Marxists reject both the notion of historical laws and scientific explanations of social change which require no evaluative concepts.

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to replace. Here again d'Entreves seems reluctant to go into the dirty theoretical spade-work which would either clarify the debate or defend the alternative he seems to embrace.

Given this problem of supplying some ethical foundation for radical political projects, it is not surprising to find a curious revival of interest and fascination with Hannah Arendt; though her adoption by the academic Left and various feminist theorists is somewhat perplexing.[3] Arendt's opposition to the Marxist theory of labor, her emphasis on public action, and her flirtation with a political defense of the councils (an historical example of ethical community) as the only institution which could sustain "embodied" freedom, make her a potential alternative to either liberal instrumentalism or such radical projects as Habermasian Critical Theory. She is the focus of d'Entreves' three central chapters.

Arendt is another theorist who has suffered grievously at the hands of commentators. Fortunately, d'Entreves has made an effort to present a clear, readable outline of Arendt's work on the three themes of modernity, action, and judgement. Though there is thankfully as little jargon and convolution as possible, the problem with d'Entreves' discussion is again that, aside from defending Arendt against such critics as George Kateb, he does little more than provide one more summary sandwiched between Habermas and Rawls. Without a critical assessment of Arendt or a sustained defense of her position as a viable answer to the dilemmas found in both liberalism and Critical Theory, the theoretical debate simply does not advance.

Arendt's position, which is relatively well known by now, involves distinguishing human action from all forms of fabrication, labor, and work. In spite of he promotion by feminist critics, Arendt's position is resolutely against all reference to the body, sexuality, or biology. She makes a rigid and unyielding division between the public and private realms, whose breach in the modern age is the reason for crisis and alienation. She directs her attack not so much against capitalism, socialism, industry, or technology but against any form in which the economy or society predominate over the public world of expressive, non-instrumental action.

Arendt complains: "What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them."[4] Her solution to both this "world alienation" marked by the rise of society and its theoretical oxymoron, "political economy," is to preserve the realm of symbolic action. For Arendt, action always means a return

3. For a surprisingly candid account of Arendt's traditional views about women, see, "Was Bleibt? Es Bleibt die Muttersprache," an interview with Arendt by Günther Gaus, broadcast October 14, 1964 and reprinted in A. Rief, ed. *Gespräche mit Hannah Arendt* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1966).

4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 53.

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to her version of the ancient notion of *praxis*. As d'Entreves summarizes her concept: "In *The Human Condition*, Arendt stresses repeatedly that action is primarily symbolic in character and that the web of human relationships is sustained by communicative interaction. We may formulate it as follows. *Action entails speech*: by means of language we are in fact able to articulate the meaning of our actions and to coordinate the actions of a plurality of agents. Conversely, *speech entails action*, not only in the sense that speech itself is a form of action . . . but in the sense that action is often the means whereby we check the sincerity of the speaker. . ." (97). This somewhat Habermasian reading of Arendt's central concept leads d'Entreves to distinguish two senses of action. "I want to argue, however, that these different assessments of Arendt's theory of action can be explained in terms of a fundamental tension in her theory between the *expressive* and a *communicative* model of action. . . . In short, action enables individuals both to express their unique identities and to establish communicative relations with others. There is little doubt, however, that these two components of action coexist in an uneasy tension, and that Arendt is prone at times to emphasize too strongly the expressive dimension at the expense of the communicative one" (111).

D'Entreves' argument often moves, as in this case above, by putting forward distinctions or appealing to them *tout court*. For example, he makes much of Benhabib's reformulation of Habermas' categories (also undefended) into instrumental, communicative, expressive, and strategic. I am less than persuaded by this style, since the world can be classified and divided up in any number of alternative ways. What theorists need to debate is why we should divide it up in *this* way and what possible reasons can be given in defense or justification of such conceptual schemes. It seems to me that the constant appeal to the "communicative," as the category meant to solve these important disputes in Habermas' version of Critical Theory, is finally just another way to state Habermas' appeal to some consensus, ideally arrived at, as the solution to central questions of political theory. We have, once again, only the illusion of any theoretical clarification by such a substitution and the reality of a quite trivial word game. Thus d'Entreves has watered down the potential clash between Arendt and Habermas by surreptitiously molding her position into a mirror of Habermas' communicative version of the social contract (granting d'Entreves' point that she fails to distinguish between action that is expressive and action that is communicative), without, at the same time, critically discussing or defending what in her approach is at odds with such a theoretical orientation.

Is there something to be salvaged in Arendt's thought? Her idea is to purge from public discourse the private, the idiosyncratic, the bodily, and the natural so as to produce a symbolic dimension that is genuinely universal, non-instrumental, and yet totalizing. Thus there would be no need for what might be called "aggregating mechanisms," such as the invisible hand of market

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forces, the state, or what Arendt calls the "rule of large numbers," which all accompany the rise of "mass society." What she wants to preserve is a public domain which would emerge from reason rather than force, from the power of human action to persuade and shape the community rather than manipulation of narrow interests and instrumental strategies. We would have, as in the title of an essay by Jon Elster, the "forum" and not the "market."[5] Notice that an unstated theme of d'Entreves' book is a common question in Arendt, Habermas and Rawls: how to account for the formation of fundamental social agreements in the face of psychological, moral, cultural, and physical diversity? It is the emphasis on the "forum" as the point of symbolic action (or simply on speech as d'Entreves reads Arendt) that links her position, in his view, with Habermas' communication theory.

George Kateb's criticism, which d'Entreves rejects, is that the crucial weakness in Arendt's approach is that this realm of action has no moral constraints. Since it is the domain in which, to follow this Greek model, heroic figures express themselves in a kind of "theatrical" display, it is only appropriate to societies in which the harm that can be done is limited by both technical and historical conditions. In such agonistic displays of excellence, if that is what Arendt means by action, political action would be all form and no content. It would not be about any decision, but simply a kind of artistic love of action and display of self for its own sake.

But in modern society, especially, such a defense of symbolic action, for its own sake, becomes dangerous and reckless. Perhaps in a small, communal structure such theatrical displays are part and parcel of rituals which unite the community. But theatricality in contemporary political life, given the potential stakes, generates ersatz unity only as part of massive mystification, self-deception, and coercion. D'Entreves' reply to these points is that Kateb must be committed to "absolute standards of morality upon which everyone agrees, or ought to agree, but never explains what makes these standards absolute or by which processes we are supposed to come to recognize their absolute validity" (120).

There are a few confusions here. First, whatever Kateb's position, it is not necessary for him to adopt an "absolute morality" to make this criticism of Arendt. D'Entreves' reply works by appealing to an extreme form of moral skepticism in defense of Arendt. But such a degree of moral skepticism is clearly rejected by Arendt. Second, d'Entreves does not correctly state Kateb's criticism. Kateb argues that Arendt's "agonal" version of Greek *praxis*, in which the virtue is to excel rather than be moral, "severs the whole point of political action — its revelatory existential achievement, its creation of human identity — from moral motivation or intention. Performing, wearing a mask, and acting from a principle are not *conceptually* tied to wanting to do the morally right thing, although of

5. Jon Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory," in *Foundations of Social Choice Theory*, ed. by Jon Elster and Aanund Hylland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

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course each could be contingently tied."[6]

While there may be many areas of life which should be exempt from moral scrutiny (what color clothes to wear for instance), it is doubtful that one of those areas is political action. That seems to be the core of Kateb's point. Of course, in the Machiavellian-Nietzschean-Schmittian tradition that Arendt is perhaps unintentionally echoing in some of her thoughts, such a freeing of politics from ethical evaluation is both defended and privileged (often with this same appeal to the Greek ideal). Kateb may also have had that tradition in mind when he made this criticism of Arendt. Thus, if Kateb is right, the weakness of Arendt's position is not only that it forgoes a domain of moral reflection but finally that it offers no justification for her attacks on modernization, the state and alienation, and in that sense she bears more similarity than she realizes with the Marxist and managerialist traditions (both of which, in their own fashion, inherit the effort to purge political discourse of moral reflection, often in the name of quasi-scientific accounts).

But even if we grant d'Entreves' version of Arendt, in which she does want an uncoerced discussion in public that will lead to both moral consensus and a higher community, there remain problems which neither Arendt nor d'Entreves confront. To engage in Arendt's conception of public life actually requires a good deal of censorship and coercion. The speaker or actor must divest him or herself of everything (including gender) that is physical, private, and material. To achieve this condition either requires a trained elite, which somehow rises above the material weight of its existence, or it requires a massive amount of control and monitoring of social actors (certainly in the modern world).

Arendt's aim, as with Rawls or Habermas, is to establish conditions that generate social consensus. But she only achieves this end by blocking out from the public sphere a great deal of social life. She consistently considers the "social" a degraded concept when compared to the public. In effect, Arendt builds into her concept of political action and the public the point at issue; a fundamental unanimity about ultimate ends and values which transcends all individual diversity and difference. Arendt then must maintain this condition of unanimity by flirting with extensive controls which separate the public from the private sphere, over who has access to public action, and over those idiosyncracies or discrepancies that threaten her imagined unity. Furthermore, there is a strong dose of paternalism in Arendt's vision, which commentators like d'Entreves choose to ignore. D'Entreves mentions such conditions as "informed judgement" and "sincerity" when he characterizes the kind of public discussion which according to Arendt ought to occur. D'Entreves seems oblivious to what may be "loaded" into such conditions for admission to the debate and that such constraints will, except under the idealized conditions already questioned, select for a very few participants to wield political power over a

6. George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984), p. 30.

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hopelessly provincial and unreliable lumpen; of course in their best interests. Perhaps Arendt, who was far closer to conservatism than liberalism, was satisfied with some such ruling elite. But I suspect those sharing d'Entreves' values would not be, and then it falls to d'Entreves to grapple with such implications. There may be a solution to reconciling these conflicting claims about the public, open discussion, and access to political power, but it is up to those who are promoting these positions to articulate such a solution and not just "hand-wave" in the right direction.

The final two chapters of this book concern John Rawls and the line of criticism initiated by Michael Sandel as "communitarianism." Here I think an important opportunity was lost by d'Entreves to expand this discussion. He summarizes Rawls' famous arguments in *A Theory of Justice* and repeats Sandel's criticism of Rawls' concept of a person. But he ignores two essays by Rawls which are important for both d'Entreves' topic and as a reply to the communitarian line of criticism. In Rawls' John Dewey Lecture, under the title "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," he presents an interesting historicist interpretation of his own work. He argues that what his conception of justice strives for is not a pure philosophical inquiry but an attempt to address issues in the recent political history of the US.

Rawls holds that in the last 200 years America has suffered basic disagreements over the nature of its social institutions and how they ought to shape moral persons. Thus his search is not for universal principles of justice, but those procedures suited to modern industrial society and perhaps, specifically, the US. Rawls continues: "we are not trying to find a conception of justice suitable for all societies regardless of their particular social or historical circumstances. We want to settle a fundamental disagreement over the just form of basic institutions within a democratic society under modern conditions. We look to ourselves and to our future, and reflect upon our disputes. . . . How far the conclusions we reach are of interest in a wider context is a separate question."[7]

Whether this qualification of *A Theory of Justice* is defensible, and perhaps it is no more than what Philip Petit calls "Kantianism in one country," is an open question. But certainly Rawls' reflections on his own work are important to d'Entreves' book and at least should be part of a larger discussion of the Sandel-inspired criticism of Rawls' approach as overly abstract, devoid of social and historical content, and instrumental.

What Rawls recommends for the solution of the normative basis of political philosophy is what he calls "constructivist" because it seeks a fair procedure which can then generate answers to substantive disputes. It is also "Kantian" because Rawls intends to criticize the utilitarian account of traditional welfare strategies and because the principle's appealed to do not depend on the physical, biological or psychological characteristics of human beings. Thus, like

7. John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 88 (1980), p. 518.

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Arendt, the point is to outline a conception of political action which is distinct from and does not rest upon prudence, survival, heredity, or custom. But, unlike Arendt, it does not involve an appeal to some theatrical and artistic vision of symbolic action.

This ambition is captured by Rawls in the contractual hypothesis of persons choosing procedural principles of justice behind a veil of ignorance. Such a veil does not allow them to decide the question by promoting any physiological, sociological or psychological characteristics that they already possess. Rawls' controversial conclusion is that persons in such a hypothetical position would opt for what he calls a "difference principle" or a "maximin" strategy. What that means is that they would rank alternative social structures by their worst possible outcome and adopt that arrangement whose worst outcome is better than the worst outcome of any other.

The reason this conclusion is controversial is because the strategy is so pessimistic and conservative. The contractors are choosing as though they will end up in the worst possible outcome — homeless, black, pregnant, disabled — and therefore must build into the social arrangement a series of institutional and distributive protections against such an outcome. There are many arguments against this conclusion and there are alternative strategies for such decisions. In fact, it is a weakness of Rawls' position that his hypothetical reasoning does not give us a unique or uncontroversial solution to the main problem; a weakness that Habermas exaggerates, as we saw above, by making the contractual act even more unrealistic and indeterminate through his suggestion of ideal speech conditions. But the one criticism of Rawls that has attracted neo-Marxists is that of Michael Sandel.

Sandel does not attack Rawls' defense of extensive welfare-type provisions. Rather, his point concerns the way the solution is derived and what picture of the human subject it assumes. Specifically, he argues against Rawls assumptions about the nature of personhood. "All interests, values, and conceptions of the good are open to the Rawlsian self, so long as they can be cast as the interests of a subject individuated in advance and given prior to its ends, so long, that is, as they describe the objects I seek rather than the subject I am."[8] Rawls' "deontology with a Humean face" is then contrasted by Sandel with a very different conception. "A theory of community whose province extended to the subject as well as the object of motivations would be individualistic in neither the conventional sense nor in Rawls'. . . . community describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*. . . . In contrast to the instrumental and sentimental conceptions of community, we might describe this strong view as the constitutive conception."[9] Here we have a version, much watered down, of Hegel's defense of the community over civil society.

8. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p 61.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

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In following the theme of his book, d'Entreves agrees with this line of criticism and concludes; "In formulating this critique I have appealed to an alternative conception of the person, more attuned to social processes of collective identity formation. Such conceptions of the embodied and relational self would allow for a greater flourishing of our public identities and for the deepening of the values of friendship and solidarity" (224).

Variations of Sandel's line of analysis appear in Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre. If we restrict our attention to Sandel, it is not so much a matter of whether or not this position adequately criticizes Rawls, but whether those seeking a role for Critical Theory should embrace it. The attraction here to the cultural Left is the argument against individualism and the defense of the community's interests over self-interest. But in spite of d'Entreves' final chapter on how theories of community are compatible with cultural tolerance, I think there are serious problems with this type of solution.

First of all, Sandel's "constitutive" idea of community needs clarification. In what sense are humans constituted by a community? Certainly we can change our way of life, alter our values, and even literally oppose the community in which we were raised. What Sandel is getting at here is the formation of identity which needs to be historical, particular and local. When identity-formation is overtaken by wholly universalistic agendas, such as state management, the individual suffers. But we ought not to forget that, at the very least, persons participate in forming their identity, their ends, and their values, and given such a weaker sense of "constitution" it is not obvious that Sandel's claim is easily translated into some political position.

The communitarian argument which d'Entreves appropriates from Sandel has, like Hegel's, the weakness that it places the community beyond all debate. The idea that the community supplies the very *identity* of individuals, rather than the more modest claim that it is *part* of what makes an individual capable of judgement, choice, and criticism, makes the community what Hegel called a "second nature;" in that sense it is no more a matter of consensus than is "first nature." Clearly, Habermas was concerned with this kind of communalism and it raises difficult questions about the nature of social objects. But d'Entreves' attempt to merge the communitarian and communicative threads of these positions is a failed gesture.

The politics of the cultural Left, or the neo-Marxist, philosophical version of Critical Theory which d'Entreves is implicitly defending, have become an incoherent combination of supposedly "politically correct" positions. This PC list includes the promotion of democracy, radical egalitarianism, the dominance of the community over the individual, the ideological character of gender, and the legal protection of rights by procedural justice. D'Entreves promises at the conclusion of his book that: "Taylor, Sandel, Walzer and Unger defend a pluralistic conception, acknowledge the legitimacy of conflict between alternative visions of the good, and argue in favor of democratic procedures

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of conflict-resolution based on tolerance, mutual respect and unconstrained political debate" (p. 244). It is implausible, however, that all these commitments mesh, at least anywhere other than in the theoretician's text.

Some of these commitments will have to be given up. A convincing case can and has been made against egalitarianism, which is unlikely to produce anything more than a levelling of social diversity. Also the predominance of the community ought not be argued for on metaphysical or holistic grounds. Communities are nothing more than collections of individuals and their decisions, which of course does not mean that all social action is what individual's intend. To deny that position is to go down a dead end where one eventually stumbles on the carcasses of Hegel, Durkheim and Edmund Burke. But there is a case to be made for communities as the kinds of structures or institutions in which, as Arendt suggested, the freedom of a human agent can be "embodied." Or perhaps put more simply, individuals require certain kinds of traditions or institutional frameworks to make it possible for them to act at all and if these frameworks are attacked for their particularity or historicity by bureaucratic or statist policies, the result is a paralysis of social action and thus strong self-identity.

But if that account of the role of community is viable, then the legal apparatus for the protection of rights, which is also based on methodological individualism and also supported by the politically correct Left, is clearly in competition with such communities. Historically and conceptually, communities and modern legal structures do not quietly coexist and often exhibit a hydraulic relation. The problem is an illusion on the part of many social theorists, including d'Entreves, that a theory of rights is benign in relation to calls for community based social identity and action. But clearly the whole thrust of rights theory is against the particularity of social identity and for the authority of universalizing laws. There are clearly dangers in both directions; communities can become exclusionary and repressive and state-agendas can become abstract and inhumane, given their lack of specificity, context and historical sensitivity.

These issues cannot be settled in a review. But raising them briefly may shed light on the earlier comment that the Left and Right have reversed, in recent political history, their commitment on the question of the individual versus the community. The reason for this shift is that both of these political views come from the same Enlightenment problem. How do we prevent the degeneration of society into barbarism? For the post-Enlightenment conservatives this threat was from the social contract deduction of individual rights which they correctly saw as a blow to the authority of traditions; thus they stood, at that moment, for community. When the idea of tradition had safely absorbed contractarianism (and, by that time, communalism meant total state-management), the Right became the apostle of individual autonomy. For the Left, conversely, politics is always seen as the defense of various group interests. Originally this position required protecting the interests of a class

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from the economic irrationality of pre-capitalist institutions (and then, in its second period, another class from the irrationality of pre-socialist economies) and that was accomplished, in the first stage, by severing the rights of individuals from communities (thus we are now living through the long delayed collapse of the second, non-individualistic strategy, which involved the construction of State-managed welfare economies). Today, however, since the Left views the problem as that of pre-socialist limits, takes the side of groups against the individual because its politics promote the welfare of women, gays, AIDS patients, American Indians, or Chicano youth gangs. The success and power of such political agendas is threatened whenever members of a society make decisions on straight individualistic or self-interested grounds; hence it opposes individualism. In practice, of course, Left politics is almost entirely a defense of human rights and very little notice is given to how incoherent this practice is with the theory it is supposed to support. The rejoinder that for some the appeal to rights is used in a Machiavellian fashion, only as an instrument to mobilize group solidarity, is the very problem at issue rather than the answer. The point, obviously, is that despite of the reversal of positions both sides have an arbitrary and opportunistic notion of community. For both, there must be a higher unity than the particular community in which an individual acts: for the Right the higher unity is the aggregating mechanism of market forces; for the Left, it is the managerial implementation of welfare. This forced choice in political theory, no matter how many epicycles we add, is a dead end.

Finally, the continual appeal to democracy must be taken more critically. Such appeals often have the simple rhetorical function of signalling an opposition to dictatorships and tyranny. But beyond that it is not clear what is being praised. What kind of democratic procedures are being praised and what is the aim of these procedures? Are democratic procedures, either direct or representative, compatible with decision-making grounded in community structures? Democracies often fragment social structures even further, unless, once again, we simply assume the solution to all these problems by projecting an ideal agreement. But one person's democratic discussion is another person's destructive polemic. Before we try to invent a new metaphysical torture so as to distinguish "real" from "fake" debate, we might consider whether a political theory which tries to rest upon highly dubious theories of communication is the problem rather than the solution.

D'Entreves' collection of essays outlines some of the central positions ranging from Critical Theory to contractarian liberalism. What the reader is not given, unfortunately, is an overall assessment of these alternatives or a defense of a choice between them, other than the hints provided by his title and final essay. In the conclusions he promises a future study of theories of justice, which may provide the context for such a deeper theoretical engagement.

Robert D'Amico

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The Holocaust, Modernity, and Tough Jews

Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 224 pp.
Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 277 pp.

Since 1945, hundreds of books have been written to explain why and how the Holocaust happened. Hundreds of books and articles have explored the question of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. During this period, the socio-political conditions that determine Jewish identity and anti-Semitism have radically changed. Not only has a strong Jewish state come into existence — one often depicted as oppressive, racist, and imperialist by its many critics — but there is now a reunified Germany, economically the most powerful in the West, ironically regarded as a haven by thousands of Soviet Jews in the "New Europe," which itself has recently experienced a rash of anti-Semitic activity. Jews still living in this Europe have experienced this rash and have had a normal allergic reaction, often associated with Jewish paranoia by those people not endangered by Judeophobia. While most Western countries officially condemn anti-Semitic violence, which is also not uncommon in the US, the tables of the Holocaust have been turned so much since 1945 that it almost seems incumbent on Jews to explain why Israel should not be eliminated and Jews put in their place, which generally means underground. As a result of post-Holocaust anti-Semitism, solutions proposed to end the Middle East crisis are not without hints of the Final Solution. More positively, the connections between Israel, anti-Semitism, and the vicissitudes of Jewish identity can only be grasped in light of the Holocaust. Such are the implications of Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* and Paul Breines' *Tough Jews*, two very different and yet related approaches to the Holocaust and Jewish identity.

Bauman begins his book with a critique of sociologists who have made the Holocaust into a specialized field and thereby negated its implications for *all* fields, thus precluding the possibility of incorporating the Holocaust into the mainstream of the academic curriculum. He wants to expand the meaning of the Holocaust by demonstrating its inextricable link to modernity, and to foster a "Holocaust consciousness," which would serve as the moral conscience of the civilizing process. Without it, we may rationalize our actions instrumentally and live always on the brink of another Holocaust. The key to such a dramatic

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claim is Bauman's underlying thesis that "the Holocaust was an outcome of a unique encounter between factors by themselves quite ordinary and common; and that the possibility of such an encounter could be blamed to a very large extent on the emancipation of the political state, with its monopoly of means of violence and its audacious engineering ambitions, from social control — following the step-by-step dismantling of all non-political power resources and institutions of social self-management" (xiii).

In his first chapter, dealing with "Sociology after the Holocaust," Bauman explains how traditional sociology and lay opinion still subscribe to the dominant modern notion that a rationally conceived socialization will lead to a higher, non-violent form of society. Such a notion is in keeping with what he calls the growth of the "modern gardening state," which views the society it rules as an object of designing, cultivating and weed-poisoning (13). The guidelines for improving humanity in this modern sense were developed in the 18th and 19th centuries in the West and were based on rational criteria that subordinated thought and action to the pragmatics of economy and effectiveness. Therefore, to be civilized in the modern era is to show how one can function without causing friction. Maintaining the rationale and rationality of the system without questioning it is considered normal, but from Bauman's viewpoint such normality is the essence of what Hannah Arendt called "the banality of evil." Bauman seeks to substantiate and expand Arendt's notions of legislated and administered forms of violence elaborated in her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Yet he takes a slightly different slant: "the bureaucratic culture which prompts us to view society as an object of administration, as a collection of so many 'problems' to be solved, as 'nature' to be 'controlled,' 'mastered,' and 'improved,' or 'remade,' as a legitimate target for 'social engineering,' and in general a garden to be designed and kept in the planned shape by force . . . was the very atmosphere in which the idea of the Holocaust could be conceived, slowly yet consistently developed, and brought to its conclusion" (18).

While Arendt elaborated a notion of the banality of evil in terms of the individual's relation to the state, bureaucracy, and law,[1] Bauman emphasizes *the dialectic of social engineering and gardening* within the civilizing process. As modern nation-states have sought to suppress irrational and antisocial drives and eliminate violence from social life though a "system of institutions that co-operate and complement each other in the imposition of a normative order and the rule

1. Cf. Dagmar Barnouw, "Speaking about Modernity: Arendt's Construction of the Political," *New German Critique*, No. 50 (Spring/Summer 1990), p. 21: "The controversy this book provoked focused largely on Arendt's definition of Eichmann's crime as an attack on human diversity and a violation of the general 'order of mankind,' rather than as murderous aggression against the Jewish people in particular. Significantly, in presenting this political-legal distinction central to her political thought, Arendt used narrative strategies, indirect discourse, and narrated monologue, which enabled her to exploit the possibilities inherent in fictional discourse to experiment with perspective."

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of law" (28), they have managed to separate violence from morality and to exclude rational operations from ethical norms and moral inhibitions. The success of a modern state is measured by its capacity to silence moral concerns and promote instrumental rationality as the means to solve everyday problems.

Bauman elaborates his major thesis in the following two chapters that deal with modernity, racism, and extermination in order to demonstrate that anti-Semitism alone cannot account for the Holocaust's uniqueness. In other words, the "civilized" conditions of modernity had to fuse with religious and racist anti-Semitism before the genocide of the European Jews could occur in its very special mode, which has become a normative measure in modernity. Obviously, what stamped the genocide as unique, as *the* Holocaust (but not the Holocaust to end all holocausts) was anti-Semitism, which Bauman is careful to distinguish from other forms of racism by exploring its peculiarities: 1) the sheer length of time, over 2,000 years, during which Jews were viewed as an alien, hostile, and undesirable group within most Western societies; 2) the universality of Jewish homelessness until the founding of Israel; 3) the self-identity of Christianity as a rejection of Judaism and Jews, which led to a conception of Jews (very early in Christian Europe) as demonic, repulsive, potent, fascinating, and frightening.

Among the peculiarities of anti-Semitism, the evolution of the "conceptual Jew" was perhaps the most singular and dominant factor in contributing to the Holocaust, for Bauman argues that the conceptual Jew "performed a function of prime importance; he visualized the horrifying consequences of boundary transgression, of not remaining fully in the fold, of any conduct short of unconditional loyalty and unambiguous choice; he was the prototype of all nonconformity, heterodoxy, anomaly and aberration. As evidence of the mind-boggling, uncanny reason of deviation, the conceptual Jew discredited in advance the alternative to that order of things defined, narrated and practiced by the Church. For this reason, he was a most reliable frontier-guard of that order. "*The conceptual Jew carried a message; alternative to this order here and now is not another order, but chaos and devastation*" (39).

As long as Jews could be recognized for what they putatively were before emancipation, secularization and the rise of modernity, they were ironically less threatened with extinction because of the laws and customs that kept them apart. However, as the nation-states provided Jews more opportunities to assimilate and modify their alleged differences, it became extremely important to re-articulate or re-create distinctions that would stick. Instead of stigmatizing Jews through religion, i.e. through Judaism, it became necessary to create their "Jewishness" for them.[2]

The crucial shift in the evolution of anti-Semitism was the transformation of religious prejudice into racism. Bauman distinguishes racism from contestant

2. On the whole question of stigmatization, see Dietz Bering, *Der Name als Stigma: Antisemitismus im deutschen Alltag 1812-1933* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988). Bering

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enmity (a specific antagonism generated by the human practices of identity-seeking and boundary-drawing) and heterophobia (resentment of the different that gives rise to anxiety)[3] and claims that "*racism stands apart by a practice of which it is a part and which it rationalizes: a practice that combines strategies of architecture and gardening with that of medicine — in the service of the construction of an artificial social order, through cutting out the elements of the present reality that neither fit the visualized perfect reality, nor can be changed so that they do.* In a world that boasts the unprecedented ability to improve human conditions by reorganizing human affairs on a rational basis, racism manifests the conviction that a certain category of human beings cannot be incorporated into the rational order, whatever the effort. . . . To use the medical metaphor; one can train and shape 'healthy' parts of the body, but not cancerous growth. The latter can be 'improved' only by being destroyed" (65).

During the latter part of the 19th century, scientists were bent on serving society by discovering and assigning specific negative and dangerous traits to Jews that were genetically reproduced and responsible for the moral, political, and aesthetic character of Jews.[4] All this was within the realm of social engineering, and Bauman maintains that "in this conception of social engineering as a scientifically founded work aimed at the institution of a new, and better, order (a work which necessarily entails the containment, or preferably elimination, of any disruptive factors), racism was indeed resonant with the world-view and practice of modernity" (68). Therefore, it was logical in the rational management of society that the murder of Jews, who represented an incurable disease, would be regarded as a normal practice of "preventive medicine."

By the 20th century all the conditions of racism and the modern view of social engineering and perfection meshed so that the Holocaust, as the most extraordinary genocide the world would know, could occur and (much worse) serve as a constituent part of the civilizing process. As Bauman points out, there were numerous instances of mass slaughter, pogroms, and genocide in the past, but they were not calculatingly planned and carried through in the name of progress or a better society. "*Modern genocide is genocide with a purpose.* Getting rid of the adversary is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end: a necessity that stems from the ultimate objective, a step that one has to take if one wants ever to reach the end of the road. *The end itself is a grand vision of a better, and radically different, society.* Modern genocide is an element of social engineering, meant to bring about a social order conforming to the design of the perfect society" (91). In

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demonstrates how names played an important role in designating Jews with negative roles. This unique function of stigmatization was crucial when Jews left the ghettos and began assimilating in Western societies.

3. Here he relies a great deal on the work of Pierre-André Taguieff's *La force du préjugé: Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988), one of the most important studies of racism to have appeared in recent years. Cf. also Pierre-André Taguieff, "Cultural Racism in France," *Telos* 83 (Spring 1990), pp. 109-22.

4. Cf. Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

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this regard, both Nazism and Stalinism "cultivated" distinct forms of modern genocide in pursuing their visions of the perfect society. However, what makes the Holocaust different from the genocide of Stalinism is its combination of the specific form of anti-Semitism and the stigmatization of the Jew as degenerate, diseased, and dangerous. In addition, the Holocaust had to appear rational and normal, and this is why Bauman places such great emphasis on "the typically modern, technological-bureaucratic patterns of action and the mentality they institutionalize, generate, sustain and reproduce" (95). For the civilized society to legitimate itself as a humane society, i.e., as a "state from which most of the natural ugliness and morbidity, as well as most of the immanent human propensity to cruelty and violence, have been eliminated or at least repressed" (96), it has had to appear as a pacifying force, the arbiter and agent of stability, which safeguards non-violent individuals and the sanctity of their bodies, while also reinforcing mechanisms of bodily self-control and cultural inhibitions of close bodily contact. However, in order for modern states to ban violence and enforce laws against violence, it has paradoxically become more violent than ever before. "What in fact has happened in the course of the civilizing process, is the redeployment of violence, and the re-distribution of access to violence. Like so many other things which we have been trained to abhor and detest, violence has been taken out of sight, rather than forced out of existence. It has become invisible, that is, from the vantage point of narrowly circumscribed and privatized personal experience. It has been enclosed instead in segregated and isolated territories, on the whole inaccessible to ordinary members of society; or evicted to the 'twilight areas,' off-limits for a large majority (and the majority which counts) of society's members; or exported to distant places which on the whole are irrelevant for the life-business of civilized humans" (97).

Bauman maintains it is the concentration of violence in the state that can bring about unprecedented results when the state is freed from competition and allowed to perfect its technology. In the case of the Holocaust, the enormous amount of tools of destruction and their high quality were put to use for a single purpose, and violence was turned into a technique. Since the purpose of Nazism and anti-Semitism was not challenged, the questions in the minds of Germans centered on finding the most efficient and cost-effective ways to make the operations of the bureaucracy work. And it works best when individuals can distance themselves from violence and not regard themselves as the perpetrators. According to Bauman, the dissociation comes about through the meticulously functional division of labor, the substitution of technical for moral responsibility, and the dehumanization of the objects of bureaucratic operation.

Under the Nazis, the bureaucracy demonstrated the dangers inherent in its organization and mentality when its "operators" focused on formulating and carrying out a task in the name of sanitation and the improvement of society. These bureaucrats worshipped rationality as their norm, and there was nothing *close* to them to contradict the organized crime of the Nazi state. In fact, "science cleared the way to genocide through sapping the authority, and

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questioning the binding force, of all normative thinking, particularly that of religion and ethics" (108). In sum, everything worked normally in Germany to bring about the most unique and atrocious kind of genocide in the 20th century, atrocious because it is so normal.

In the concluding chapters of his book, Bauman probes deeper into the reasons for the "success" of the Nazis and their program of genocide focusing on the cooperation of the victims and the obedience of the victimizers — all the while drawing parallels with conditions in our post-Holocaust society and setting the grounds for a discussion of sociological theory of morality based on a Holocaust consciousness. The cooperation of the Jews in their own genocide has been a delicate and controversial subject ever since the publication of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1964.[5] Bauman is careful to point out that the Nazis would have accomplished their goals with or without the help of Jewish elites, but then the nature of the Holocaust, its most atrocious and unique feature, would not have been the same, for Jewish cooperation seemed normal and rational to them even though the Jews were part of a social rearrangement that was to destroy them. As Bauman remarks: " 'Ordinary' genocide splits the actors unambiguously into the murderers and the murdered; for the latter, resistance is the only rational response. In the Holocaust, divisions were less clear. Incorporated in the overall power structure, given an extended set of tasks and functions within it, the doomed population had apparently a range of options to choose from. Cooperation with their sworn enemies and future killers was not without its own measure of rationality. *The Jews could therefore play into the hands of their oppressors, facilitate their task, bring closer their own perdition, while guided in their action by the rationally interpreted purpose of survival*" (122). Bauman supports his thesis by presenting numerous historical cases in which Jews *acted rationally* because they complied with laws and sought to find the most "rational" solution to desperate situations while the German population was indifferent to their fate. He does not point a moralistic finger at the Jewish elites or ordinary Jews who cooperated with the Nazis, for he is more interested in showing how the Holocaust operation was predicated on the rational actions of its prospective victims. And this is also the case with the victimizers. However, instead of dealing with the Nazis within their own bureaucratic structure, he shifts his focus to the contemporary American scene and the controversial Milgram experiment of 1974 to discover how the

5. Two books which have taken Arendt to task are: Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, The Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1965) and Isiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972). Three other accounts more sympathetic to Arendt's views are: Stephen J. Whitfield, *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), and Dagmar Barnouw, *Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1990).

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Holocaust has become part of our normative behavior. As is well known, Milgram, a psychologist from Yale University, used actors in his experiment to test average Americans, who were to punish the actors with shocks if the actors did not respond correctly to certain questions. The actors, who were placed in another room, feigned suffering as the shocks were increased, and despite the apparent suffering, most of the subjects, who were absolved of responsibility, continued to comply with the rational rules of the experiment and administered shocks strong enough in some cases to kill the actors. For Bauman, "the meaning of Milgram's discovery is that, immanently and irretrievably, the process of rationalization facilitates behaviour that is inhuman and cruel in its consequences, if not in its intentions. *The more rational is the organization of action, the easier it is to cause suffering* — and remain at peace with oneself" (155).

Actually, the victimizer does not regard himself or herself as a victimizer because of the distance both psychically and physically from the suffering victim. In addition, the victimizer's clean conscience is reinforced through the collective; that is, he or she is part of a collective enterprise that in itself has become the normative instance through which an individual gains a sense of right and wrong. As Bauman argues, "a bureaucratic system of authority does not militate against moral norms as such, and does not cast them aside as essentially irrational, affective pressures which contradict the cool rationality of a truly efficient action. Instead, it deploys them — or, rather, re-deploys them. *Bureaucracy's double feat is the moralization of technology, coupled with the denial of the moral significance of non-technical issues*. It is the technology of action, not its substance, which is subject to assessment as good or bad, proper or improper, right or wrong" (160).

If today morality is determined by the instrumental rationality of a bureaucratic system which serves a state that essentially monopolizes and rationalizes violence as a positive norm, then it is not surprising that all kinds of crimes and murders can be committed with abandon, calculation, and indifference — and without the perpetrators having a sense of guilt. Put another way, the nature of evil is determined by social conditions, and modernity has brought about an especially disturbing situation in which "*society — in addition, or even contrary, to its 'moralizing function' — may, at least on occasion, act as a 'morality-silencing' force*" (174). This was the case with the Holocaust, and the potential for another Holocaust remains with us because we have not found a way to combat the conditions that gave rise to it in the first place.

As a result of the dialectic of the civilizing process, Bauman argues that we need a sociological theory of morality that focuses on the process of socialization as "*the manipulation of moral capacity* — not its production. And the moral capacity that is manipulated entails not only certain principles which later become a passive object of social processing; it includes as well the ability to resist, escape and survive the processing, so that at the end of the day the authority and the responsibility for moral choices rests where they resided at the start: with the person" (178). This means that the issue of morality must be relocated to the

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area of "repressive, pattern-maintaining and tension-managing processes and institutions, as one of the 'problems' they are designed to handle and accommodate or transform" (178). In short, Bauman argues that "the factors responsible for the presence of moral capacity must be sought in the *social* but not *societal* sphere. Moral behaviour is conceivable only in the context of coexistence, 'being with others,' that is, a social context; but it does not owe its appearance to the presence of supra-individual agencies of training and enforcement, that is, of a societal context" (178-79).

Basing his sociological theory of morality on Emmanuel Levinas' ideas in *Ethics and Infinity* (1982), Bauman maintains that the most primary attribute of human existence is 'being with others,' which means bearing the responsibility for the Other without any sort of contractual obligation. Existential responsibility is the only meaning of subjectivity and has nothing to do with the calculation of reciprocal benefit. "Responsibility being the existential mode of the human subject, *morality is the primary structure of intersubjective relation* in its most pristine form, unaffected by any non-moral factors (like interest, calculation of benefit, rational search for optimal solutions, or surrender to coercion). The substance of morality being a duty towards the other (as distinct from an obligation), and a duty which precedes all interestedness — the roots of morality reach well beneath societal arrangements, like structures of domination or culture. Societal processes start when the structure of morality (tantamount to intersubjectivity) is already there. *Morality is not a product of society. Morality is something society manipulates* — exploits, re-directs, jams" (183).

During the Nazi era the Holocaust and its perpetration depended on removing the Jews from the proximity of German citizens. Once the process of social separation was accomplished, the moral feeling of responsibility of the majority of Germans could be neutralized. Historical studies show, according to Bauman, that the Germans, despite their anti-Semitism, were repulsed by the Nazi treatment of the Jews because of their "pre-societal" feeling of responsibility. Only by removing the Jews from the proximity of the Germans could the Nazis manipulate the moral capacity of the Germans and conduct their murderous business as normal. "The neutralizing, isolating and marginalizing was an achievement of the Nazi regime deploying the formidable apparatus of modern industry, transport, science, bureaucracy, technology. Without them, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. . . . It was the designing of the 'solution to the Jewish problem' as a rational, bureaucratic-technical task, as something to be done to a particular category of objects by a particular set of experts and specialized organizations — in other words, as a depersonalized task not dependent on feelings and personal commitments — which proved to be, in the end, adequate to Hitler's vision. Yet the solution could not be so designed, and certainly not executed, until the future objects of bureaucratic operations, the Jews, had been removed from the horizon of German daily life, cut off from the network of personal intercourse, transformed

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into the abstract concept of the *metaphysical Jew*. Until, that is, they had ceased to be those 'others' to whom moral responsibility normally extends, and lost the protection which such natural morality offers" (188-89).

Bauman's book is an admirable effort to recapture and bring us closer to a sense of pre-societal morality at a time when normal rational operations in most societies seek to remove us from the violence and immoral acts that the modern states commit in the name of civilization. Only if we are ashamed, Bauman suggests, to live in a world in which the conditions for the Holocaust are actively maintained, can we begin to combat the evil of banality that exists all around us. In this regard, the lessons of the Holocaust are not those to be learned only by Jews and Germans, are not to be taught only in specialized programs, but are pertinent for the whole of humanity.

On the whole, Bauman's arguments are very convincing and the quality of his work is indicative of how a political-moral position can lead to fruitful results in sociology. There are, however, some puzzling features that should be discussed before turning to Breines' *Tough Jews*, which point to the interesting relation between these two works.

Throughout Bauman's book there are apparent and striking parallels to Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), especially to the chapter "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment." For instance, one passage especially might have served as the motto of Bauman's book: "Attacking or defending blindly, the persecutor and his victim belong to the same sphere of evil. Anti-Semitic behavior is generated in situations where blinded men robbed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects. For those involved, their actions are murderous and therefore senseless reflexes, as behaviorists note — without providing an interpretation. Anti-Semitism is a deeply imprinted schema, a ritual of civilization; the pogroms are the true ritual murders. They demonstrate the impotence of sense, significance, and ultimately of truth — which might hold them within bounds. The idle occupation of killing confirms the stubbornness of the life to which one has to conform, and to resign oneself."[6]

Much of Bauman's critique of modernity and his discussion of instrumental reason and anti-Semitism was first elaborated by Adorno and Horkheimer, and it is puzzling why he did not comment on their work, especially in the latter part of his book, where he conceives his sociological theory of morality. It would seem that Adorno and Horkheimer in various works tried to set the groundwork for a sociological theory of morality, especially with Adorno's dictum, "it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz," and that Bauman should have addressed their works in light of his own critique of how sociologists in Great Britain (and probably in America as well) have failed to address the question of the Holocaust in their discipline. It is well known that Adorno

6. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by S. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), p. 171.

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led a massive attack on the positivism of Western sociology with Auschwitz in mind, and Bauman is clearly following in his footsteps. To be sure, there are major differences, such as Bauman's firm belief that domination can be overcome through modified social behavior, something that Adorno would have questioned. Even here, Bauman's notions of morality and identity, which he says are only in their inceptive phase, would have profited from an *Auseinandersetzung* with Adorno.

Aside from his neglect of Adorno and Horkheimer, there is another problematic aspect in Bauman's work. In attempting to avoid the trap of inverse racism, he dismisses the notion that there was something unique about German anti-Semitism. This leads him to neglect a whole body of literature about the peculiarities of German anti-Semitism.[7] The fact that there are distinct national differences in anti-Semitism does not undermine Bauman's general thesis about modernity, but these differences should compel him to rethink his moral categories in terms of the notion of civility in the historical development of each nation-state and national characteristics. Even today, the Holocaust and the potential for bringing out the Holocaust conditions to a danger point are being treated in very different ways by individual nations.

Ironically, it is because Breines focuses on the unique development of American Jewry and Zionism that he can shed light on some of the general features of the dialectic of the Western civilizing process that support Bauman's thesis. That is, Bauman might have enriched his study if he had also focused on some unique national factors in modernity that allow for some very strange configurations, as Breines demonstrates. *Tough Jews* is a compelling critique of American Jewry and its obsession with becoming tough *and* also an urgent plea (directed largely at Jews) to resist gently those forces of "Zionization" and "Americanization" that have brought out the fascist potential of American Jews and Israelis alike. As he states, "the Trauma of Nazi mass murder made the Jewish yearning for toughness especially strong, while nearly two thousand years of self-definition according to an ethos of meekness and gentleness made toughness unacceptable. Unwilling to reject either fully, the Israeli and the post-Holocaust American Jew have sought to have *both*. They want in Israel, a moral *Machtstaat*, a conqueror state with a conscience; they want to subordinate others or to kill while themselves remaining the chosen people, 'a light unto the nations' " (19).

Breines is disturbed by the fact that the image of the Jewish victim and the Holocaust are used by Jews to rationalize the manner in which Israelis and Jews victimize others. He himself had never believed that brutality had been part of the Jewish tradition until he began doing research on his book and uncovering

7. Two important studies on this topic are: Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *Towards the Holocaust* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983) and Herbert A. Strauss and Norbert Kampe, eds., *Antisemitismus: Von der Judenfeindschaft zum Holocaust* (Bonn: Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1985).

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unwritten chapters about Jewish toughness and Jewish fantasies that made him reflect upon his own Jewishness and recent signs of Jewish oppression in Israel and America. The discoveries which Breines kept making, especially about Jewish history and himself, forced him to write several drafts over a period of about seven years and eventually led him to divide his book in three parts. Part one deals with relations between Jewish gentleness and toughness in light of an analysis of fantasies by Sigmund Freud, Philip Roth, and himself. The underlying motif here is that the fantasies, largely by Jewish males, are about bodies and are somehow connected to the conception of the tough Jew in American culture and politics during the past thirty years. Part Two is a historical survey which debunks the theory that Jews are weak either due to their nature or religion, and it also attacks the Zionist notion that Jews need a Jewish state in order to show how tough and virile they are. Part Three is a study of approximately forty novels, published during the past thirty years, largely in America, "that constitute a new subgenre of contemporary fiction: the tough Jewish novels. Though not the only expressions of Jewish toughness in America," Breines believes, "these novels are the most concentrated expression of it. They confront the reader with Jewish-American ambivalence and flights from ambivalence on tough Jewish matters, and they offer a sharp look at the processes of brutalization and Americanization" (xiii-iv).

Throughout Breines' engaging book, he focuses on various aspects of the body, and how Jews, who have been stereotyped as gentle and meek, have longed for another type of a muscular and tough body. From the very beginning he remains on a personal level and diagnoses Freud's famous "Hannibal" fantasy and a passage from Roth's autobiography in relation to his own ambivalence of what it means to be a Jew in light of meekness and toughness. From the personal he moves to the political and proposes that the Jewish desire to identify with a strong body/defender has played a major role in the success of Zionism. "The Jewish desire to enter the world of bodies is the desire of an excluded, beleaguered minority for what the dominant majority considers *normalcy*. Zionism has been straightforward in its contention that a Jewish state is the key to the normalization of the Jewish situation and that the abnormality of the Jews as a political problem caused by statelessness. And statelessness, according to Zionism, is the cause of meekness, frailty, passivity, humiliation, pogroms, futile appeals to reason and dialogue — in short, Jewish weakness and gentleness. . . . Zionism boldly redefined that commitment to nonviolence as a chronic Jewish ailment that could be cured only by forging a Jewish state, which would transform the Jews into a nation like the others. In the political sphere, the sphere of states, however, normalcy involves not only flags, symbols, youth movements, national anthems, patriotic holidays, and the like, but also *conquest and organized killing*" (47-8).

In short, there are two interrelated developments in modern history that have led Jews in America to assume their present "tough" role that is detrimental to

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the welfare of Jews in general: Zionism and assimilation. The turning point was 1967, when the Israelis won the Six Day War, which essentially meant the defeat of the gentle Jew as the ideal role model for Jews in America. The Israeli victory enabled American Jews to play out their fantasies and identify themselves with the tough Israelis in contrast to the meek Jews of Europe, who had seemingly gone to their deaths like sheep during the period of Nazism. Through the Israeli victories and aggressive behavior, American Jews could live up to the "American manly and tough ethos" (68), which was asserting itself toward the end of the 1960s. Zionism in the form of a virile and hard Jewish state enabled American Jews to gain a measure of self-respect in America, but it also became a dilemma as Israel became more brutal in its treatment of the Palestinians. As a consequence, American Jews have needed the Holocaust to apologize for Israeli politics and the recent tough image of the Jews. That is, if it had not been for the Holocaust, Jews would not have had to establish a Jewish state, become tough, and project a "new" image. But the fact is, from the Jewish viewpoint, a danger of another "Holocaust," resulting in the depiction of Arabs as Nazis, has necessitated a strong Jewish state and body.

Breines answers these "rationalizations" in the second part of his book, "From Masada to Mossad" by demonstrating that there had always been a "Jewish toughness" in the history of Jews, and that to be tough and strong as a Jew did not mean that a Jewish state had to be formed. Up until 73 A.D., Jews had enjoyed a reputation as great soldiers and tillers of the soil, but after their defeat at Masada, it seems that the strong Jewish soldier evaporated. However, relying on recent historical studies, Breines shows that Jews did not become completely meek and passive in the ensuing years. He cites numerous cases of Jewish rebelliousness and Jews participation as soldiers in various armies from the French Revolution to the present. He also examines the role played by Jewish robbers in Europe and Jewish gangsters in America. Finally, he devotes a whole chapter to Vladimir Jabotinsky, the gray eminence of Jewish toughness, who was the most militant and controversial leader in organized Zionism, for Jabotinsky's strain of Zionism seems to have triumphed in the contemporary world. It was Jabotinsky who became the leader of militant and terrorist Zionist groups in the 1920s and 1930s and formed the revisionist Zionist movement that called for a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River. The result was a fervent nationalism that led to extreme actions by the Stern gang and became a determining factor in the formation of the state of Israel.

Breines does not recount the history of Jewish toughness simply to recall that there is this other feature of Jewish identity. In fact, he regards the "gentle Jew," who is often likened to an effeminate, passive creature, and the "tough Jew," who has recently been associated with fascism despite its Aryan model, as stereotypical images that exclude alternatives. By basing the discussion of Jewish identity on these two types, it appears that there are only two real social and ontological alternatives for a Jew: *either* assimilation *or* Zionization. "These seemingly polarized strategies of grappling with the historical question of Jewish

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marginality, victimization, and 'otherness' share with one another the impulse to *normalize* the Jewish situation, to actualize what might be called a positive solution to the Jewish question. Assimilationism proceeds individualistically to cancel Jewish otherness by transforming Jews into Germans, Italians, French, Canadians, Brazilians, and so on; Zionism proceeds collectively and politically to the same end — that of cancelling Jewish difference — by transforming Jews into Hebrews or Israelis, members of a nation-state like any other. . . . But one of the functions of the dominant discussion between Zionism and assimilationism is to exclude and marginalize the alternatives" (164-65).

This exclusion can be best seen in the rise of a new genre of literature that features the tough Jew and is the focus of the last section of Breines' book, entitled "The 'Rambowitz' Novels." According to Breines, "the cult of the tough Jew as an alternative to Jewish timidity and gentleness rests on ideals of 'masculine beauty,' health, and normalcy that are conceived *as if their validity were obvious and natural*. They have, in other words, internalized unquestioningly the physical and psychological ideals of their respective dominant cultures. In doing so they forget that, far from being self-evident cultural universals, those ideals are predicated on a series of exclusions and erasures — of effeminate men, pacificism, Arabs, gentleness, women, homosexuals, and, far from least, Jews" (167).

Breines examines over thirty novels by Ken Follett, John Le Carré, Gerald Green, E. Howard Hunt, Leon Uris, Ernest K. Gann, William Caunitz, Peter Abrahams, and others to study their common features. His remarkable analysis reveals some disturbing results: most of the novels normalize violence, relativize morals, redepict Jews as muscular manly men with their tough Jewish female counterparts as Sabras, concoct racist images of Arabs, and imply that, since Jews cannot trust anyone, another apocalypse may be around the corner. The composite picture that these novels produce — and even more recent ones that take a more critical look at Israel and the tough Jews — is that of Israel transformed into a new ghetto, surrounded by hostile Arabs and betrayed by Americans. In other words, the ironic outcome of the process of becoming tough is the *re-formation* of Israel as the victimized Jewish body. The only answer to such a situation, Breines suggests, can be a "summons gently to abolish the conditions that generate toughness itself" (240).

Clearly, Breines cannot end his book with a specific program of how to do away with the Zionization and Americanization of Jews. The strength of his book lies in its depiction of the quandary of American Jews, which is his own quandary as an assimilated American Jew. Though his analysis is extremely convincing, there are some disturbing aspects that need further elaboration.

Breines appears so intent on demonstrating how American Jews have neglected to deal with toughness and how they have rationalized their Zionization that he plays down the manipulative force of anti-Semitism in Jewish history. The overriding sense that one gains from Breines' arguments is that Jews themselves have forged the image of the tough Jew instead of analyzing how this image results from Jewish reactions to anti-Semitism and stigmatization

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and the imposition of this image from the outside. In fact, even though Breines alludes to the plight of the Americanization of the Jews and the consequences of toughness in American culture, there is very little discussion of how the role of the tough Jew is connected to American culture, nor is there a distinction made between what toughness means to American Jews and what toughness may mean to Israelis. One could argue that there is a positive side to toughness that has also helped Jews, and that toughness does not necessarily lead to brutality. For instance, there have been many testimonies by German Jews that indicate how the strong role played by Israel helped them psychologically to come to terms with anti-Semitism and identity problems in Germany. Although the changing image of Israel in the 1970s and 1980s has been problematic for the German Jews, they themselves have not shown a tendency to become "tough," nor have the French and Italian Jews. If anything, one of the features that *anti-Semitic* groups in Europe want to stress is the *toughness* of Jews. In other words, European Jews have been equated with Israelis (since all Jews are essentially bound to their Zionist homeland) and are labelled fascist and imperialist because they are part of an international Jewish conspiracy to take over the world.[8] The "tough Jew" image is being imposed on European Jews, and it is this imposition in America that Breines needs to study more closely.

Nevertheless, the notion of "toughness" as a measure of how well Jews have assimilated in American culture is remarkably well developed by Breines, and his notions of assimilation are connected to Bauman's ideas about normalization and the dialectic of the civilizing process. Both Breines and Bauman indicate that to become a full-fledged member of a nation-state in today's world one must subscribe to violence and brutality without accepting the moral responsibility for this "subscription." Such "normal" membership in a civilized state actually absolves one from responsibility, since it is perfectly possible today to be an anti-racist anti-Semite and a racist Philosemite and justify one's position on acceptable definitions of normative behavior within one's state. The determinant evaluative category of one's morals and ethics is how rational one acts in the name of a new world order and how hard one is in calculating when to draw the line in the name of genuine civilization. But "the hardened individual represents that which is better only in relation to a hardened society, and not in absolute terms. He reflects the shame felt at everything the collective system inflicts on the individual and what happens when there are no more individuals."[9] To their credit, both Bauman and Breines reflect our shame by admirably resisting the hardening tendencies in a civilizing process run amuck.

Jack Zipes

8. See Pierre-André Taguieff, "La nouvelle judéophobie: antisionisme, antiracisme, anti-imperialisme," *Les Temps Modernes*, No. 520 (November 1989), pp. 1-80.
9. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

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The Character of our Content

Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). 175 pp.

In a society with no over-arching value system, identity becomes problematic and ends up equated with consumerism and lifestyle. Seemingly, black Americans have not had to face this problem of identity, for the heritage of racism has always informed blacks of who they are and where they fit. And yet as early as 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of a double consciousness in black Americans, about being American and black. During the early 20th century, the theory of cultural pluralism was formulated to counter the general efforts of "Americanization" strategies to homogenize different peoples and to protest the racial hatred of the time (witnessed in race riots). Now it seems as if "post-modern" theories of the ineradicable "other" have taken the place of cultural pluralism. After all, both cultural pluralism and post-modern theory stress specificity. The latter, however, vindicated "otherness" against what it terms Eurocentrism, thus precipitating discourse into a dead end relativism whose hidden agenda is upward mobility for academics with questionable credentials. Unfortunately, much that is written about race today feeds into this logic.

Shelby Steele's book definitely does not fall into this category, and explodes the liberal understanding of race in American politics. When dealing with racial inequity, liberalism has fallen into a contradiction. From its original universalism followed the view that race was not a relevant category for evaluating people. Yet liberalism has created compensatory programs such as affirmative action, which emphasize race. As a result, universalism gets lost in the bureaucratic shuffle. Steele accepts this universalism and does not shy away from its logical conclusions, which inevitably lead him to attack many liberal programs.

Accordingly, much of what went wrong with black politics occurred in the 1960s. It has become easy today to reminisce about the good old days when King led a fierce fight based on moral principles; now even McDonald's celebrates King's efforts. Steele goes beyond such sentimentalism and points out that in the 1960s black power fueled a cynical dynamic whereby the civil rights movement "descended more and more to the level of secular interest group politics" (19). Bartering and accusatory protests — an instrumentalization of racism — took the day. But Steele, who is not a neo-conservative, does not just blame black leadership. Much of the blame falls on "white redemption from racial guilt" which fueled welfare programs based on race (79). The result is detrimental not only for black identity, but also for politics in general.

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Steele is best known for his penetrating critique of affirmative action. His criticism is not predicated on the belief that our society, and especially academia, runs on standards, and that affirmative action quotas foul the seas of meritocracy. His criticism is concerned primarily with what happens to blacks because of compensatory programs. One of the more interesting points is that affirmative action substitutes "signs" of racial betterment for authentic improvement. As he puts it, "Racial representation is not the same thing as racial development, yet affirmative action fosters a confusion of these very different needs. Representation can be manufactured; development is always hard-earned" (116). Not only does affirmative action succumb to the worst tendencies of American politics — statistics as proof of betterment, superficial change, etc. — it also encourages blacks to "exploit their own past victimization as a source of power and privilege" (118). As far as Steele sees it, development of the race needs to be encouraged over the superficial counting of numbers as proof of equality and the locking of actors into positions of victims.

The stress on victimization and compensation leads to things such as "race fatigue, a deep weariness with things racial" (23). As accusations about racism become a normal part of American politics, they become hallow and serious charges end up lost among the perfunctory ones. Victimization also stresses accusations so that all politics is reduced to protest. Thus, compensation winds up perpetuating the paternalist logic lingering from the days of slavery. Steele describes recent compensatory programs and black interest group bargaining, which are most prevalent on American campuses, as an attempt "to keep blacks focused on an illusion of deliverance by others . . ." (174). This is the real curse of recent black politics.

Steele also provides some interesting social-psychological insights concerning what it means to grow up black. He gives a new twist to theories of low self-esteem, "compensatory grandiosity" (playing up one's capacity to counteract one's ultimate powerlessness), hesitation, and black middle-class anxiety. But Steele is at his best when he writes about racial and academic politics: "a politics of difference, a troubling, volatile politics in which each group justifies itself, its sense of worth and its pursuit of power, through difference alone" (132). His analysis is not the *status quo* apologetics that Left critics have made it out to be. Rather, it is a condemnation of the ruin of black politics.

Steele is clear on how to remedy the present state of affairs. Not only does he suggest a focus on discrimination (which is by no means the same as affirmative action), he also stresses the blacks' need to reconstitute family and community. But at times he also subscribes to a version of the Horatio Alger myth. He writes that blacks should not "neglect the individual initiative that would deliver them from poverty — the only thing that finally delivers *anyone* from poverty" (16). There is nothing wrong with emphasizing individual responsibility — in fact, it is necessary for reconstituted social bonds — but to subscribe to individualism as the cause for betterment misses the fact that Jews and other groups did not make it merely by means of individual effort but, rather,

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through networks of mutual support. This also leads Steele to give a bit too much credit to Reagan's alleged populist call — a call which ran counter to his massive defense buildup, privileges to corporations, and further bureaucratization of the state. Steele eventually rejects Reagan, but his analysis focuses on philosophy, not on the contradiction between communitarian populism, with which Steele sympathizes, and the reality of Reagan's policies.

When it comes to locating possibilities for a renewed ethic of responsibility, Steele looks to the middle-class — precisely the class he argues against throughout the book. He himself confesses of being guilty of "yuppie hedonism" in his own life, albeit a "moderate strain" (21). What is the likelihood that the professional middle-class will reinstate a sense of responsibility? Steele himself provides plenty of evidence that it is unlikely. Similarly, for Steele, racism boils down to "a struggle for innocence" (5). This focus on "innocence" clouds his analysis. When he asks: "Why do we cling to an adversarial, victim-focused identity that preoccupies us with white racism?" He can only answer with: "I think because of fear, self-doubt, and simple inexperience" (170). He is not clear enough about the possibility that a certain class — what has been called the "new class" — amongst blacks has instrumentalized this sort of politics for the direct benefits they receive, via affirmative action. Occasionally he seems to forget that racism has to do with politics and not just morality. At any rate, Steele's work is penetrating and thought-provoking, and written in a lucid style which seems to have been forgotten by most English professors.

Kevin Mattson

The Tribulations of Economic Reforms

Victor Nee and David Stark, eds., *Remaking the Economic Institutions of Socialism: China and Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

Peter Van Ness, ed., *Market Reforms in Socialist Societies: Comparing China and Hungary* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989).

These books are collections of papers presented at conferences held in early 1985 (Van Ness) and 1986 (Nee and Stark). Despite subsequent revision and updating, they not unexpectedly dwell on the preoccupations of their time. These include such questions as the "efficient" mix of plan and market among

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state enterprises, the forces at work in institutional evolution, and the feasibility of movements toward the market mechanism given the constraints imposed by "the party's monopoly of political power" and "loyalty to Marxism" (Van Ness, 4). Even while these books were in press, discussions concerning reforms had already shifted toward the question of whether and how to mix ownership structures and organizational forms — an obvious challenge to the previously sacrosanct position of state ownership (at least for the nonagricultural sectors of the economy). Since these books were published, East European discussions have shifted to the *terra ignota* of how and at what pace to privatize the economy, while in China reforms are for the time being still constrained by the "party's monopoly of political power," if not "loyalty to Marxism." The articles on China may still be relevant, while the ones on Hungary (the only East European case taken up in either set of papers) may be more or less of value, depending on whether they offer a plausible rendering of what kind of society it was so as to facilitate understanding what they can become.

Exclusive of a variation on a previously published article by Kornai,[1] the Van Ness collection contains three papers on Kadar-era Hungary. Ranki ("The Introduction and Evolution of Planning in Hungary") provides an historical survey of changes in planning through the New Economic Mechanism of 1968; the wholly descriptive account provides little in the way of analysis of "reforms" as such. Marer ("Market Mechanism Reforms in Hungary") surveys the evolution of economic reforms and assesses their effects on economic performance; the vanguard role of the transformation of the agricultural sector is an important point. Shaozhi ("A Chinese View on the Reform of the Economic Mechanism in Hungary") speaks of the "synthesis of plan and market" in his description of the Hungarian experience, and while admitting such a synthesis has not been realized, asserts that "the regulated market advocated by Hungary . . . is the same as China's planned commodity economy . . ." (209). The article is useful less for its insights into the Hungarian experience than for its portrayal of ideological acrobatics as performed by the former director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. The mastery of doctrinaire platitudes is impressive.

Nee and Stark also offer three chapters on Hungary (again, exclusive of Kornai's previously published article), but with a good deal more substance. Drawing on his study of semi-autonomous off-hours work groups that subcontract with state enterprises, Stark ("Coexisting Organizational Forms in Hungary's Emerging Mixed Economy") sees the remaking of economic institutions through such a "hybrid mixture of public ownership and private initiative" (167), allegedly representing a nascent "plurality of organizational principles" (140). More specifically, these work groups mean that "an internal labor market is constructed within the socialist firm" (146). However, it would seem to

1. Janos Kornai, "The Hungarian Reform Process: Visions, Hopes, and Reality," in *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (December 1986).

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be stretching things a bit to see these as internal market transactions. Are all transactions market transactions? Certainly analysis will be sharpened through more conceptual precision than is found in Stark's interpretation. Overall though, the article provides interesting and insightful evidence for his claim that "the path to reforming a socialist economy lies less in promoting competition among firms than in fostering competition among organizational forms" (168).

Szelenyi ("Eastern Europe in an Epoch of Transition: Toward a Socialist Mixed Economy") endorses the spirit of Stark's interpretation with his claim that "Genuine and lasting reforms are not reforms by design but reforms by default, the products of invisible, everyday struggles, fought below the political surface." (230) He claims that through a process of "socialist embourgeoisement," "state socialism may still be capable of adapting to the challenge of the intensive stage of growth" (208). Through the widening scope of the second economy of small scale part-time private businesses, more and more of the Hungarian economy would be subject to a hard budget constraint, with consequent success in high technology and world markets. This vision of "letting the economy outgrow the plan" (see Shirk, below, for its Chinese application) is fully consistent with the conventional wisdoms of orthodox economists. So too is Szelenyi's identification of state socialism's main problem as "economic actors currently lack interest in increasing wealth of firms; they wish merely to maximize yearly incomes" (228).

Brus ("Evolution of the Communist Economic Systems: Scope and Limits") would seem to endorse this interpretation. As a *mea culpa* he confesses that "it was wrong to underestimate the question of property rights in the blueprints of economic reform" (271), and the broader part of his article is devoted to the "substantive difficulties in combining plan and market on the basis of public ownership" (260). The apparent need for a strong center of economic administration and a strong preference for large enterprises and large concentrations of economic activity represent for Brus "exigencies of central control" which "inevitably generate tendencies at variance with conditions propitious for the operation of the market" (268). Other obstacles to economic reform — understood as the "move toward a different regulating principle" — are the vested interests of social groups and resistance of the "monoarchy" (for Brus, the antithesis of Dahl's polyarchy). That resistance is seen as due to the fact that "some features of the centralistic model of functioning of the economy are virtually inseparable from the way power is exercised . . ." (261).

Five chapters on China are found in the Van Ness volume; one[2] was previously published and will not be reviewed here. Huan ("China's Open Door Policy, 1978-88") provides an informative description of Special Economic Zones and argues the importance of reducing the gap between the domestic

2. Peter Van Ness and Satish Raichur, "Dilemmas of Socialist Development: An Analysis of Strategic Lines in China, 1949-1981," in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol. XV, No. 1 (January/February 1983).

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and international structures of relative prices; there is little here that has not been said elsewhere (and it is said better by Lardy, below). Thomas ("Market Reforms and Human Rights in China") concludes that "market reforms" (as of the mid 1980s) "have so far not greatly harmed progress in social and economic rights" and "may hold the prospect for increased civil and political rights . . ." (191). Loehr and Van Ness ("The Cost of Self-Reliance: The Case of China") provide an excessively simplistic statistical analysis of the Cultural Revolution's effects on economic growth. Their claim is that by making the Chinese economy "less sensitive to changes in the [foreign] trade balances" (272), the economic policies of the Cultural Revolution "helped to reduce the adverse effects" (275) of the more general and all-encompassing strategy of self-reliance.

None of these three articles makes a concerted effort at systemic or institutional analysis. Chen ("China's Market Reforms in Comparative Perspective") tries, but comes up short. Following a superficial discussion of the Soviet and Yugoslav experinces, he argues the need "to give full play to the supplementary role of the market as a regulator of the economy within the framework of a planned economy . . ." which as a practical matter involves "mandatory planning for key industries with guidance planning for the rest . . ." (141). China's economic problems are attributed to over-centralization and egalitarianism. Overall, the article is strong on cliches — viz. "a socialist economy is a planned economy. . . . [I]t is in a planned economy that socialist commodity production and exchange should be actively developed" (130) — and weak on analysis.

The Chinese experience is also given five chapters by Nee and Stark. Whereas Lin ("Open-Ended Economic Reform in China") sees Eastern European reforms as documenting a coherent theoretical formulation, he argues that the process in China is at best informed by "highly generalized reform principles" (99) and that they represent an "incremental, natural, and evolutionary process of transition from one economic morphology to another" (135). One can easily refute his "blueprint following" interpretation of the Eastern European experience, as well as take issue with his conceptualization of the Chinese experience as a process of "selective experimentation." The article is nonetheless useful for the range of issues it addresses. For example, an indisputable Chinese reality is regional autarky and fragmentation, arguably a product of "planning" since 1957.[3] Lin takes up this "cellular" economic structure and the associated paucity of "intersectoral and interregional transactions and linkages," and it is apparent that "marketization" in such a context can easily exacerbate centrifugal tendencies.

In contrast, Lardy ("Dilemmas in the Pattern of Resource Allocation in China, 1978-1985") has a narrower range of concerns, to the extent that "prices" are his preoccupation. Like most economists, he sees pressures for reform as arising from the needs of intensive growth. Yet this is certainly not an obvious proposition in the case of China. He does little to establish the relevance of the

3. See Thomas P. Lyons, *Integration and Planning in Maoist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

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claim for China's experience. Granting his premise however, his preoccupation is understandable: intensive growth is driven by the efficient use, rather that mobilization, of resources. And all economists know that "getting prices right" is requisite to the efficient use of resources. Accordingly, his discussion of the constraints on achieving "market socialism" focuses on the lack of congruence between world and domestic prices (Huan's concern, above), the prereform price structure for industrial goods, and the need to successfully renegotiate profit retention among sectors and enterprises if there is to be any hope of acceptance of meaningful price reform.

Shirk ("The Political Economy of Chinese Industrial Reform") is likewise concerned with the constraints on economic reform. Some of Lardy's points are made here as well, but there is less of a one-dimensional focus on prices. Shirk identifies a variety of reasons why the introduction of profits, competition, and markets is more difficult in industry than in agriculture. These include the greater complexity and interdependence of industrial production, the greater size and market concentration of industrial firms, the government's fiscal dependence on the surplus generated in the industrial sector, and the resistance offered by competing and entrenched bureaucratic institutions (especially heavy industries and their ministries, which enjoyed centrality in the phase of extensive accumulation) to any change in the sectoral and territorial distribution of resources. More generally, efforts to depoliticize the economy invariably generate a "power struggle between local administrative . . . bureaus on the one hand and basic enterprises on the other" (359). This is good political economy! Shirk's assessment of the constraints on industrial reform leads to a strategy of "letting the economy outgrow the plan" (355) — the relative expansion of economic activities that fall outside the central plan and government budget. Shirk also argues that strengthening of reform coalitions at the local and regional levels is essential, and that this is more likely to occur if administrative decentralization precedes economic liberalization.

The matter of reform coalitions is very much at issue in the question of what it takes to establish and maintain "emergent markets" which are "embedded in social structures in which cadres play a pivotal role." (191) Nee ("Peasant Entrepreneurship and the Politics of Regulation in China") argues that the "institutional requirements for markets and entrepreneurs have to be renewed, created. and legitimized by the socialist state" (173) and that such a pro-market stance is possible only if the state enhances its capacity for autonomous action" (205) by the "greater closure of its organizational boundaries" (206). He provides an unconvincing discussion of the "organizational dynamics of regulatory intervention" and its alleged effect of moving the state "toward bureaucratic rationalization" (195). Nee sees rational pursuit of economic interest as the key to comprehending social change, but, as a proponent of the new economic sociology, he locates that rational pursuit "within networks of ongoing social relations" (171). Despite the qualification, his perspective parrots the optimizing model that is the hallmark of orthodox economics. Much is conceded to *homo*

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economicus, and too much is conceded to the ideologically loaded parables about property rights, transaction costs, and the "workings of the market as an efficient allocative mechanism" (189). If this be economic sociology, why bother? The orthodox economists are already far ahead in this game, and they are certainly more rigorous. Certainly sociology is not so bankrupt!

Whyte ("Who Hates Bureaucracy? A Chinese Puzzle") posits the central role of struggles against bureaucratism in political and systemic change in China. His argument is that the Maoist assault on elitist and exclusivist practices within bureaucracy was paired with a promotion of an ever more pervasive bureaucratic presence in society. This way of framing the matter allows Whyte to pose a stark contrast with the post-Maoist antidote for bureaucratism, i.e., the intention to circumscribe "the structural reach of bureaucratic power" while promoting more "legal-rational procedures" (252) within the bureaucracy. Whyte admits that such distinctions are "superficial and cosmetic" so long as such changes are constrained by a "Leninist system."

In varying ways, the articles in these two volumes address the "economic crisis" of "state socialism." Most see that crisis as expressive of systemic antinomies associated with intensive accumulation, and they by and large treat the economy — or more specifically, plan and market — as essentially instruments or mechanisms for the coordination of economic activity and transmission of information. The apparently hypercentralized planning apparatus is seen as incapable of orchestrating intensive growth, though it was "functional" to extensive growth.

To the contrary, the configuration of institutions and practices that had come to be associated with extensive accumulation is not characterized by hypercentralization so much as the dissipation of any rational integrative logic, due both to pervasive centrifugal tendencies and the institutional fusion or conflation of diverse and often contradictory functions and inconsistent objectives.[4] Bearing such features, actual institutional arrangements and processes assured a pattern of surplus allocation that both fueled extensive accumulation (characterized by the prominence of inter-sectoral resource transfer, demographic transition, priority growth of heavy industry, etc.) and assigned the surplus among sectors, strata, classes, and regions. By definition, "economic reform" must alter that pattern of surplus allocation, and in so doing, destroy the established pattern of social stratification through its effects on the distribution of income, employment, status, and social welfare more generally. Resistance to such changes does not require a "Leninist system" nor a "monoarchy"; it requires vested interests, pure and simple.

As Stark and Nee ("Toward an Institutional Analysis of State Socialism") point out, analysis of state socialist societies must be informed by a conceptual perspective other than the totalitarian or modernization paradigms. Most of this introductory chapter is devoted to a sketch of what they champion as the

4. See Andrew C. Pienkos, "Organizational Contradiction and Policy Inertia in Yugoslav Institutional Evolution" in *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. XX, No. 2 (June 1986).

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emerging new paradigm — a perspective capable of comprehending both the "patterns of institutional regularity" and the "distinctive institutional processes by which state socialism was stably (if inefficiently) reproduced" (9). The imprint of Kornai is readily apparent in the conventional wisdoms that they bandy about. Stark and Nee put such notions as "paternalism of public ownership," "shortage economy," "hard/soft budget constraint," etc. — along with those appropriated from orthodox economics more generally, such as transaction costs — at center stage. This is unfortunate. Certainly the totalitarian and modernization paradigms deserve to be interred (though I thought they had been, and some time ago). But if Stark and Nee have their way in establishing a new paradigm, what could be good social science is in danger of succumbing to the "imperialism of economics" that has been all-too-evident in academic social science since the 1970s.[5] Not only our understanding of the past is at stake here; so too are our visions of the future.

Employment of their perspective leads Stark and Nee to the claim that "state socialism represents a distinctive social formation that has its own institutional logic and dynamics of development" (30). Was it not modes of production that were supposed to have such properties? In any case, it may be that the most important contribution of both the Van Ness and Nee and Stark collections is inadvertently serving as evidence of the limited usefulness of conceiving of "state socialism" as a "system" in any meaningful sense. The stronger articles are those that provide an historically specific analysis of actual institutional arrangements and social relations. Their testimony makes one skeptical as to whether "state socialism" can be understood as an ensemble of social relations out of which a logic of social reproduction is generated. Efforts on the part of Kornai and others to impute some "logic" — be it "shortage economy" or whatever — to these societies have been well received because this allows for a tidy symmetry in the comparative investigation of capitalism and "state socialism." But capitalism does constitute a system. The exigencies of capital accumulation stamp a logic upon the configuration of institutions and indeed shapes the evolution of those institutions. Simply put, there is an economic imperative that essentially defines the logic of social reproduction in capitalism. In stark contrast, if there is anything generically systemic evident in the diverse experiences of "state socialist" societies, it is a political imperative of a rather primitive kind. And herein lies the source of the economic maladies of such societies.

Andrew Pienkos

5. Indeed, Stark and Nee credit Douglass North as a source of inspiration for the "institutional analysis" they champion. For a telling indictment of where North's perspective leads, see Douglass North and Robert Paul Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973). This is an unabashed effort at history according to the neoclassical parable. It is entertaining.

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84 *THE FUTURE OF THE USSR:* **Piccone:** *Paradoxes of* Perestroika **Luke:** *Postcommunism in the USSR* **Pellicani:** *Soviet Development?* **Brandt:** *Soviet Nationalities* **Goldman:** *Soviet Federalism?* **Fleherty:** *The Soviet New Left* **Nelson:** *The Soviet Union and Europe* **Bérard-Zarzicka:** *The Authoritarian Perestroika Debate* **Migranian, Kliamkin, Zorina:** *Authoritarian* Perestroika? **Wilke:** *Adorno and Derrida on Husserl.*

83 **Schmitt:** *European Jurisprudence* **Piccone, Ulmen:** *The Future of Europe* **Clarke:** *Crisis of Fordism?* **Policar:** *Racism and its Other* **Taguieff:** *Cultural Racism in France* **Weber:** *Lyotard on Discourse* **Nikolinakos:** *Foucault's Ethics* **Tester:** *Collapse of Socialism* **Pipa:** *Serbian Apologetics* **D'Amico:** *Intellectual Eclipse* **Zipes:** *Reunifying Germany* **Michael:** *Vanguard and Critique* **D'Amico:** *Packaging Fog*

82 *Telos Conference on THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL THEORY* **Meuschel:** *End of E. German Socialism* **Adam:** *Isreal and South Africa* **Elkins:** *Mystical Ecology* **Roth** *Durkheim and 1789* **Lichtblau:** *Simmel, Tönnies and Weber on Gender* **Barbiero:** *After the Aging of the New Music* **Hullot-Kentor:** *After Barbiero* **Luke:** *Unwrapping the Cold War and the New Deal* **Piccone:** *Unwrapping Luke*

81 **Hullot-Kentor:** *Back to Adorno* **Luke:** Perestroika *in the US?* **Wolnicki:** *Avoiding E. European Questions* **Kuznetsov/Shirokov:** *Converting Soviet Defense Industries* **Pellicani:** *Reply to Oakes* **Oakes:** *Four Questions to Pellicani* **Wallace:** *The Two Spirits of Capitalism* **Gonzales:** *Exorcising* Perestroika

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80 **Schwartz:** *Reform/Repression in Tibet* **Friedman:** *Re-Stalinization in China* **Staniszkis:** *The Obsolescence of Solidarity* **Tarkowski:** *Corruption in Poland and the USSR* **Wolnicki:** *Self-Government in Poland* **Leante:** Perestroika *at a Snail's Pace* **Grady:** *On Literary Studies* **Djilas:** *The Communist Crisis* **Bayer:** *Interview with Djilas* **Telò:** *The SPD* **Izyumov:** *Demilitarizing the Soviet Economy*

79 *PERESTROIKA* IN EASTERN EUROPE **Rittersporn:** *Reforming the Soviet System* **Carlo:** *Contradictions of* Perestroika **Bauman:** *Poland: On its Own* **Ost:** *The Transformation of Solidarity* **Urban:** Perestroika **Selucky:** Perestroika *in Czechoslovakia* **Süß:** *East Germany's Politics* **Pipa:** Glasnost *in Albania?* **Pitassio:** *Reforms in Bulgaria*

78 **Bauman:** *Universality and Particularity* **Zuckermann:** *Israel and the Holocaust* **Schuler:** *Back to Union Station*

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